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THE BEAUTIES

OF

BLAIR AND JORTIN.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

BLAIR.

JORTIN.

THE

CHRISTIAN SOUVENIR;

OR,

THE BEAUTIES

OF

BLAIR AND JORTIN,

CONSISTING OF

EXTRACTS FROM THE SERMONS

OF THOSE

EMINENT DIVINES.

Second Edition.

LONDON:

SMALLFIELD AND SON, 69, NEWGATE STREET.

1839.

374.

BIBLIOTECA BODLEIANA

PREFACE.

In presenting this small volume to the public, the Editor has constantly had in view a desire to extend, as far as possible, those important truths of Christian, precepts and duties, the practice of which, every one who bears the name of Christian will consider as essential to his present and everlasting happiness.

Though in the style of Dr. Jortin we may not find the easy flowing language of a Blair, yet the truths of religion are presented in such a plain and forcible manner, that they may, perhaps, be equally calculated to impress the heart with a due sense of the importance of not only *professing* ourselves Christians, but proving by our actions that we are so: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I command you?"

It may be said, we are already fully acquainted with our duty; this is true: but how apt are we, in the pursuit and bustle of worldly cares, to forget the most important truths; and how frequently do we need reminding, in our intercourse with each other, of the Christian law of kindness and charity! Such truths presented to our view in a small volume, may perhaps command our attention more frequently than in a larger work, because more conveniently perused. In adversity or prosperity, we may here derive support, comfort, and satisfaction. In every difficulty of life, we may here find something to soothe, guide, and assist us. In the regulation of our conduct and tempers, we may here find that counsel and advice which will not only increase our domestic happiness, but also assist us to live in Christian love and charity, with all around us.

The Editor has derived much pleasure from collecting the following Extracts. They will probably pass principally under the partial eye of friends; but as they will not be screened from the eye of public judgment, it is hoped the good intention of thus presenting them to the

world, will check the severity of critical censure.

To those who have kindly assisted in promoting their publication, the Editor presents the most sincere and grateful acknowledgments; and if they should be found useful in the promotion of piety and goodness, the time bestowed on them will not be considered to have passed by unimproved, or to have been entirely lost.

Dec. 15, 1828.

PREFACE

TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

THE Editor of the following Extracts begs to acknowledge with sincere gratitude the kind patronage and approval that attended their first publication, and trusts that the present Edition will not lessen the favorable opinion which has been already so kindly expressed towards it.

LONDON, JAN. 1839.

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A

SHORT ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIVES OF THE AUTHORS.

Dr. Blair, a distinguished preacher and writer, the descendant of an ancient family of Ayrshire, in Scotland, and the son of a respectable merchant at Edinburgh, was born in that city, April 7, 1718. As his views were at an early period directed to the church, he entered the university of his native place in 1730, and spent eleven years in the prosecution of those studies which the church of Scotland prescribes to such as are intended for the ministerial office. One of his performances at this time, indicating the bent of his genius towards polite literature, was an Essay on the Beautiful, which afforded such satisfaction to Professor Stevenson, that it was appointed to be publicly read at the conclusion of the Session. This honor was probably a stimulus to his exertion, and an earnest of his future fame. His method of study consisted in making abstracts of the most important works which he read, and in digesting them according to the train of his own thoughts. With this view he con-

structed a comprehensive series of chronological tables, for the study of history, in which was inserted every important fact that occurred. In 1739, Mr. Blair took his degree of Master of Arts, and having completed his academical course, became a licensed preacher in 1741, and was presented to the parish of Colefice, in Fife, where he was ordained September 23, 1742. Such at this time was his established reputation, that when a vacancy occurred, at the Canongate Church, Edinburgh, he was chosen to supply it, and accordingly he returned to his native city in July, 1743. In 1754, he was translated from the Canongate to Lady Yester's, one of the city churches; and in 1758, he was promoted to the High Church of Edinburgh, the most important ecclesiastical charge in North Britain, where his ministerial labours were conducted with the greatest prudence, ability, and success, for more than forty years. From this time he enjoyed greater leisure for directing his attention to other important literary objects; accordingly he commenced, Dec. 11, 1759, with the approbation of the university, a series of lectures on composition. The university of St. Andrews had, in 1757, bestowed on him the degree of Doctor in Divinity. The university of Edinburgh the following year determined to institute a rhetorical class as a permanent part of their ecclesiastical establishment; and on the 6th of April, 1762, his Majesty was graciously pleased to erect and endow a Professorship of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh, and to

appoint Dr. Blair regius professor thereof, with a salary of £70. Dr. Blair's reputation had been long acknowledged by those who had the pleasure of attending his ministry; but it was not till the year 1777, that he could be induced to favor the world with a volume of his Discourses, which had long furnished instruction to a delighted congregation. The manuscript of this volume was received by the bookseller with some hesitation; but it was no sooner published, than he found it his interest to engage the author to furnish him with other volumes. Accordingly five volumes in the whole have been published at different periods; and we affirm that no collection of sermons has ever been more profitable to the bookseller, and more acceptable to the public, than Dr. Blair's. The circulation of them was rapid and extensive. They were translated into several foreign languages, and received a royal reward; a pension of £200 a year was conferred on the author, and continued till his death.

The last volume of his sermons was prepared for the press, by the author, after he had completed the eighty-second year of his age, and delivered to the publisher about six weeks before his death. Besides these sermons, and an Essay on the Beautiful, before mentioned, Dr. Blair published in 1759, De Fundamentis et obligatione Legis Naturæ. Two Sermons preached on particular occasions, some Translations, in verse, of passages in Scripture for the psalmody of the Church, and a few articles in

the Edinburgh Review. Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Letters in two volumes, quarto, 1763. A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossion, 1763, which for beauty of language, delicacy of taste, and acuteness of critical investigation, has few parallels. Although he left many other discourses in manuscript, he explicitly enjoined that they should be destroyed, and thus wisely prevented that injury to his reputation, which has sometimes been the result of posthumous publications. In April, 1748, he married his cousin, Katharine Bannatine, daughter of the Reverend James Bannatine, one of the ministers of Edinburgh. By her he had a son who died in infancy, and a daughter who lived to her twenty-first year, the pride of her parents, and adorned with all the accomplishments that became her age and sex. Mrs. Blair herself, a woman of great good sense and spirit, was also taken from him a few years before his death, after she had shared with the tenderest affection in all his fortunes, and contributed near half a century to his happiness and comfort. His constitution was naturally delicate and feeble; but he enjoyed upon the whole a good state of health. He retained his faculties to the last; and after a short illness of three days, expired on the 27th of December, 1800; with the composure and hope of a Christian pastor. The lamentation for his death was universal throughout the city, he had so long instructed and adorned. The magistrates ordered his church to be put in mourning; and Dr. Finlayson, sen., the sabbath day after his

interment, preached a funeral sermon to his congregation, with an extract from the conclusion of which this account shall be closed. "It was peculiarly delightful to see him in the latest period of his life, at the venerable age of eighty-two, looking back on almost threescore years spent in the public service of his God, possessing a mind still vigorous and clear, and with all the ardour of youthful ambition, preparing the materials of a new claim to the gratitude and admiration of posterity. In this active state of preparation, with the lamp of life still clear and bright, he was found by the Great Lord of All, when he came to say, it is enough; and after a single night of pain, to call him gently to his rest. He is gone to give an account of his stewardship. The church mourns in him the loss of her brightest ornament. Let us submit to the stroke with resignation and reverence; and as the most acceptable proof of respect to his memory, let us learn to practise the lessons which he taught."

The other author from whom these extracts are taken, though not now so generally known, was celebrated in his time, for his various publications; and his sermons on the Christian religion, caused him early to be distinguished, as one of its ablest defenders, and have obtained for their author an unperishable name.

DR. JORTIN, born in London in 1698, was the son of Renatus Jortin, a native of Britany, who came over to England on the repeal of the edict of Nantes. His mother was the daughter of an English clergyman, his father perished at sea with Sir Cloudesly Shovel, when his ship struck on the rocks of Scilly. This was in October, 1707, when his son John, only nine years of age, was sent to the Charter-house, where he laid the foundation of an elegant classical taste. In 1715, he was admitted pensioner of Jesus College, Cambridge, and so distinguished himself by his talents and application, that he was recommended by Dr. Thirlby, to translate some of Eustathius' notes on Homer for Mr. Pope. He performed the work to the satisfaction of the poet, and was at that time about 19 years old. Mr. Jortin was admitted to the degree of Batchelor of Arts in January, 1718-19, and was elected Fellow of Jesus College in October, 1721, and in the following year he took his degree of M.A. In this latter year he appeared as a writer, by the publication of Lusus Poetici, a collection of Latin poems, which have been frequently reprinted, and still retain their original reputation. He was admitted to priest's orders in 1724, and in 1727, was presented by his college to the Vicarage of Swavesey, near Cambridge. In the following year he married the daughter of Mr. Chibnell, of Newport Pagnell, resigned his living and settled in London. We shall not follow our divine through all his changes of situation. His discourses concerning the truth

of the Christian Religion were published in 1746. These sermons have obtained a high reputation, and have served also to rank the author among the ablest defenders of revelation. About this time, he was engaged by Warburton, as his occasional assistant, which produced an intimacy between these two learned, but in many respects very dissimilar divines. In December, 1749, Mr. Jortin, at the recommendation of Archbishop Herring and Bishop Sherlock, was appointed preacher of Boyle's lecture. The substance of the discourses he preached on this occasion, was afterwards inserted in his Remarks on Ecclesiastical History. Mr. Jortin was now far advanced in life, with very little of the professional reward which his worth and services merited; in 1751, Archbishop Herring presented him with the rectory of St. Dunstan in the East, and in 1755, he was presented by the same Archbishop with a Lambeth degree of D.D.; and the declining years of Dr. Jortin were cheered by more substantial proofs of the esteem which his character and abilities had inspired. In 1762, he was collated by Bishop Osbaldiston to a prebend in the Cathedral of St. Paul's, and in the same year he was presented, by the same friend, to the valuable vicarage of Kensington. The Bishop, as another proof of his determined patronage of our author, appointed him Archdeacon of London, in April, 1764, and offered him the rectory of St. James's, Westminster. But he chose to continue at Kensington, that being a situation better adapted to his advanced age. Dr. Jortin died

on the 5th Sept. 1770, in the seventy-second year of his age. The tranquil composure of his last moments was expressed in the words he spoke to his nurse, who urged him to take more nourishment: "No," said he, "I have had enough of every thing." He left a widow and two children. Rogers Jortin, of Lincoln's Inn, in the profession of the Law; and Martha, married to the Rev. Samuel Darby, late Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, and afterwards Rector of Whatfield, in Suffolk. His earliest publication was his Lusus Poetici before mentioned, besides which he published

Discourses concerning the truth of the Christian Religion.

Miscellaneous Observations on Authors ancient and modern.

Remarks upon Ecclesiastical History.

These remarks were continued in four succeeding volumes, two published by himself, and two after his death.

Six Dissertations on different subjects.

The Life of Erasmus.

Remarks on the Works of Erasmus.

Sermons on different subjects, 7 vols. octavo.

Remarks on Spencer's Poems.

The Present State of Letters.

A Sermon preached at the Consecration of the Bishop of Bangor.

Remarks on Tilletson's Sermons.

Letter concerning the Music of the Ancients.

Remarks on Phillips's Life of Cardinal Pole.

He was buried in the new church-yard at Kensington, as he had directed; and had a flat stone laid over him with this inscription, dictated by himself:—

Joannes Jortin, Mortalis esse desiit. Anno Salutis, 1770. Ætatis 72.

The following character of our author was drawn by the energetic pen of Dr Parr:—"Whether I look back (says he) to his verse, to his prose, to his critical, or to his theological works, there are few authors to whom I am so much indebted for rational entertainment or for solid instruction. Learned he was, without pedantry. He was ingenious without the affectation of singularity. He was a lover of truth, without hovering over the gloomy abyss of scepticism; and a friend to free inquiry, without roving into the dreary and pathless wilds of Latitudinarianism. He had a heart which never disgraced the powers of his understanding. With a lively imagination, an elegant taste, and a judgment most masculine and most correct, he united the artless and amiable negligence of the school boy. Wit without ill-nature, and sense without effort, he could at will scatter upon any subject, and in every book the writer presents us with a near and distinct view of the real man."

THE BEAUTIES

OF

BLAIR AND JORTIN.

ON FORTITUDE.

BLAIR.

WITHOUT some degree of fortitude, there can be no happiness; because, amidst the thousand uncertainties of life, there can be no enjoyment of tranquillity. The man of feeble and timid spirit, lives under perpetual alarms. He foresees every distant danger and trembles. He explores the regions of possibility, to discover the danger that may arise. Often he creates imaginary evils; always magnifies those that are real. On the first shock of adversity, he desponds. Instead of exerting himself to lay hold on the resources that remain, he gives up all for lost; and resigns himself to abject and broken spirits. On the other hand, firmness of mind, is the parent of tranquillity. It enables us to enjoy the present without disturbance; and to look calmly on dangers that approach, or evils that threaten in future. It suggests good hopes, it supplies resources. It allows a man to retain the full

possession of himself, in every situation of fortune. Look into the heart of this man, and you will find composure, cheerfulness, and magnanimity. Look into the heart of the other, and you will see nothing but confusion, anxiety, and trepidation. The one is the castle built on a rock, which defies the attacks of surrounding waters. The other is a hut placed on the shore, which every wind shakes, and every wave overflows.

The man of virtuous fortitude, follows the dictates of his heart, unembarassed by those restraints which lie upon the timid. Having once determined what is fit for him to do, no threatenings can shake, nor dangers appal him. He rests upon himself, supported by a consciousness of inward dignity. I do not say that this disposition alone, will secure him against every vice. He may be lifted up with pride. He may be seduced by pleasure. He may be hurried away by passion. But at least in one quarter he will be safe; by no abject fears mislead into evil.

Let him who would preserve fortitude in difficult situations, fill his mind with a sense of what constitutes the true honour of man. It consists not in the multitude of riches, or the elevation of rank; for experience shows, that these may be possessed by the worthless, as well as by the deserving.—It consists in being deterred by no danger, when duty calls us forth; in fulfilling our allotted part, what-

ever it may be, with faithfulness, bravery, and constancy of mind. These qualifications never fail to stamp distinction on the character. They confer on him who discovers them, an honorable superiority, which all, even enemies, feel and revere. Let every man, therefore, when the hour of danger comes, bethink himself, that now is arrived the hour of trial, the hour which must determine, whether he is to rise, or to sink for ever in the esteem of all around him. If, when put to the test, he discovers no firmness to maintain his ground, no fortitude to stand a shock, he has forfeited every pretension to a manly mind. He must reckon on being exposed to general contempt; and, what is worse, he will feel that he deserves it. In his own eyes he will be contemptible, than which, surely, no misery can be more severe.

But in order to acquire habits of fortitude, what is of the highest consequence is, to have formed a just estimate of the goods and evils of life, and of the value of life itself. For here lies the chief source of our weakness and pusillanimity. We overvalue the advantages of fortune, rank, and riches, ease and safety. Deluded by vain opinions, we look to these as our ultimate goods. We hang upon them with fond attachment; and to forfeit any hope of advancement, to incur the least discredit with the world; or to be brought down but one step from the situation we possess, is regarded with conster-

nation and dismay. Hence a thousand weights hang upon the mind, which depress its courage, and bend it to mean and dishonorable compliances. What fortitude can he possess, what worthy or generous purpose can he form, who conceives diminution of rank, or loss of fortune, to be the chief evils which man can suffer? Put these into the balance with true honor, with conscious integrity, with the esteem of the virtuous and the wise, with the favor of Almighty God, with peace of mind, and hope of heaven; and then think, whether these dreaded evils are sufficient to intimidate you from doing your duty. Look beyond external appearances to the inside of things. Suffer not yourselves to be imposed on by that glittering varnish, with which the surface of the world dazzles the vulgar. Consider how many are contented and happy without those advantages of fortune, on which you put so extravagant a value. Consider whether it is possible for you to be happy with them, if, for their sake, you forfeit all that is estimable in man. The favor of the great, perhaps, you think, is at stake; or that popularity with the multitude on which you build plans of advancement. Alas! how precarious are the means which you employ, in order to attain, the end you have in view; and the end itself, how little is it worthy your ambition? That favor which you pursue, of dubious advantage when gained, is frequently lost, by servile compliance. The timid, and abject, are detected, and

despised, even by those whom they court; while the firm, and resolute, rise in the end to those honors, which the other pursued in vain.

Consider as a man, and a christian, for what purpose life was given thee by heaven.—Was it, that thou mightest pass a few years in low pleasures and ignoble sloth; flying into every corner to hide thyself, when the least danger rises to view? No; life was given, that thou mightest come forth to act some useful, and honorable part, on that theatre, where, thou hast been placed by providence; mightest glorify him that made thee; and, by steady perseverance in virtue, rise in the end to an immortal state. Nourish then that fortitude of mind, which is so essential to a man and a christian. Let no discouragement nor danger deter thee from doing what is right. Through "honor and dishonor, through good report, and bad report," let us preserve fidelity to our God and our Saviour. "Though an host should encamp against us," let us not fear to discharge our duty. God assists us in the virtuous conflict; and will crown the conqueror with eternal rewards.

ON THE TRUE HONOR OF MAN.

BLAIR.

It is religion, that in every situation of life, forms the honor, as well as the happiness of man. The

true honor of man, is not what merely commands external respect, but what commands the respect of the heart. We must look, not to any adventitious circumstance of fortune; not to any single sparkling quality; but to the whole of what forms a man; what entitles him, as such, to rank high among that class of beings, to which he belongs; in a word, we must look to the mind, and the soul. A mind superior to fear, to selfish interest and corruption; a mind governed by the principles of uniform rectitude and integrity; the same in prosperity and adversity; which no bribe can seduce, or terror overcome; neither by pleasure melted into effeminacy, nor by distress sunk into dejection; such is the mind which forms the distinction and eminence of men.

The honor which man acquires by religion and virtue, is more independent, and more complete, than what can be acquired by any other means. It is independent of any thing foreign or external. It is not partial, but entire respect which it procures. Wherever fortune is concerned, it is the station or rank which commands our deference. Where some shining quality attracts admiration, it is only to a part of the character that we pay homage. But when a person is distinguished for eminent worth and goodness, it is the man, the whole man whom we respect. The honor which he possesses is intrinsic. Place him in any situation of life, even an obscure one; let room only be given for his virtues

to come forth and show themselves, and you will revere him, as a private citizen; or as the father of a family. If in higher life he appear more illustrious, this is not owing merely to the respect created by rank. It is because, there, a nobler sphere of action is opened to him; because his virtues are brought forth into more extended exertion; and placed in such conspicuous view, that he appears to grace, and adorn the station which he fills. Even in the silence of retirement, or in the retreat of old age, such a man sinks not into forgotten obscurity; his remembered virtues continue to be honored, when their active exertions are over; and to the last stage of life he is followed by public esteem and respect. Whereas if genuine worth be wanting, the applause which may have attended a man for a while, by degrees dies away. Though for a part of his life, he had dazzled the world, this was owing to his deficiency in the essential qualities having not been suspected. As soon as the imposture is discovered, the falling star sinks into darkness. There is, therefore, a standard of independent, intrinsic worth, to which we must bring in the end whatever claims to be honorable among men. By this we must measure it; and it will always be found, that nothing but what is essential to man, has power to command the respect of man's heart.

The honor acquired by religion and virtue, is honor divine and immortal. It is honor not in the

estimation of men only, but in the sight of God; whose judgment is the standard of truth and right; whose approbation confers a "crown of glory that fadeth not away." All the honor we can gain among men is limited and confined. Its circle is narrow. Its duration is short and transitory. But the honor which is founded on true goodness, accompanies us through the whole progress of our existence. It enters with man into a future state; and continues to brighten through eternal ages.

Earthly honors are both short-lived in their continuance, and, while they last, tarnished with spots and stains. On some quarter or other, their brightness is obscured; their exaltation is humbled. But the honor which proceeds from God, and virtue, is unmixed and pure. It is a lustre which is derived from heaven; and is likened in scripture, "to the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; to the light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Whereas the honors which the world confers, resemble the feeble and twinkling flame of a taper; which is often clouded by the smoke it sends forth; is always wasting, and soon dies totally away.

Let no one imagine, that in the religious part of this character, there is any thing which casts over it a gloomy shade, or derogates from that esteem which men, are generally disposed to yield, to exemplary virtues. False ideas may be entertained of

religion; as false, and imperfect, conceptions, of virtue have often prevailed in the world. But to true religion, there belongs no sullen gloom; no melancholy austerity, tending to withdraw men from human society, or to diminish the exertions of active virtue. On the contrary, the religious principle, rightly understood, not only unites with all such virtues, but supports, fortifies, and confirms them. It is so far from obscuring the lustre of a character, that it heightens and ennobles it. It adds to all the moral virtues, a venerable and authoritative dignity. It renders the virtuous character more august. To the decorations of a palace, it joins the majesty of a temple.

THE PROFIT OF GODLINESS.

JORTIN.

If we consult the old Testament, we find many assurances of worldly prosperity to the good, or, which is all one, affirmations that piety ever carries along with it a present reward. But when we consider how these promises are made good to the righteous, there are objections which press upon us from all sides. As the most careless observation will shew us much misery and trouble falling indifferently upon the good and bad, and from which the most religious life can give no security. We

see some, suffering hardships, because they are virtuous, and will not sacrifice their conscience to their present interest. If we look back into the history of past ages, we find, that it ever was so, and that the same complaints have been always made. If we consult the opinion of grave and wise men, we find many of them, in all times, setting forth the evils of human life, in strong terms, and declaring, that more trouble than satisfaction is to be expected in our passage through this world.

If we peruse the books of the Old Testament, we find there also the same observations, that man is born to trouble, that all is vanity, and that there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked. In the New Testament we have examples of oppressed and persecuted virtue, in John the Baptist, in the disciples of our Lord, and in the first Christians.

Hence it appears, that *complete* happiness in this life is not to be understood in these assurances, and therefore when we speak of the temporal reward of righteousness, we must not suppose it to comprehend every thing, which reason would represent to be good and desirable, and which might be inocently pursued and possessed. We must reckon that person sufficiently happy, who passes his days with tolerable ease and satisfaction.

Temporal rewards are promised to piety; and if all those who call themselves christians, were

influenced by these and other proper motives to live suitably to the religion which they profess, it would manifestly appear, that godliness is profitable unto all things: if any nation would be eminently virtuous, it would be distinguished from others by many temporal advantages; if any society entertained just and honorable notions of God, if they loved their neighbours as themselves, if they were sober, temperate, frugal and industrious, if they were honest without compulsion, through principles of honour and virtue, if they preferred a good name to pleasures, riches, or power, and the public interest to private profit, if they would think, and act thus, they would escape more than half the evils which befall mankind.

Though much of the benefit which might be reaped from piety is lost to the world by the perverseness of the wicked, and though the righteous, by dwelling with them, are often sufferers upon their account; yet the promises made to godliness are personal, and therefore we may in the most disorderly state of things, expect advantages from it, of which none shall be able to deprive us.

Virtue has a natural tendency, to promote happiness, and to remove from us many evils. A good life, produces the testimony of a good conscience, hope of a future reward, cheerfulness, resignation to God's will, reliance upon his providence, patience under adverse circumstances, and a power of regu-

lating the passions. A just, generous, humble, and charitable behaviour, usually produces returns of civility and of good offices, secures from enemies, or wins them over, or makes their malice ineffectual and contemptible, raises up faithful friends, establishes a firm, and lasting reputation, commands respect and esteem, and makes men prosper in their callings.

Temperance and industry commonly preserve health of body, and of mind, enable us to procure, to keep, to enjoy what is necessary, and to despise what is superfluous. As these are the natural fruits of goodness, it may very well be said in scripture, that it has a reward here, because it often produces these effects, and will always produce them, unless violently disturbed and hindered by other causes interposing. We may as truly assert in general that piety produces happiness, as we affirm that seed sown in good ground, brings forth fruit in due season, though liable to occasional blasts and accidents.

As to the future rewards of righteousness they were certainly the hope and expectation of all good men, in all ages of the world. But in the gospel, where life and immortality are more clearly revealed than in the Old Testament, fewer temporal blessings are set before us as motives to obedience. Long life is not absolutely promised us, because we are taught, that not how long we live, but how well we

live, ought to be our chief care; that, a life cannot be too short which is spent in a regular obedience to God, nor a death untimely which conducts to perpetual happiness.

Riches are not promised us, because we are taught that the life of man consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses, and that food, and raiment, and a contented mind, are great wealth. An exception from common calamities is not promised to us, because we are taught, that afflictions are often divine favors, very useful to us, and means to make us wiser and better.

The promises given to us, are, peace of mind, and joy in the Holy Spirit, with a supply of the things absolutely needful for our subsistence. True it is that all who call themselves Christians, possess them not; but the question is, whether the fault be not in them, and whether by their imprudent conduct, and by many defects, they deprive not themselves, of God's favor and support. These promises are made to those who are truly religious, and if a person be such, his conscience will speak peace to him at all times, and his hopes, and expectation, of future happiness, will enable him to bear with courage, and constancy, inconveniences, and disappointments, under which a worldly and vicious mind, would sink and despond.

Virtue is apt to produce and secure to us, all the happiness which we can reasonably expect in a state of trial; vice in its own nature tends to make our condition worse, than it would otherwise be, and so far the advantage is on the side of virtue. The ordinary calamities, and troubles waiting on mortality, fall upon the good, and the bad: but the good bear them best, and feel them least. The wicked have nothing to comfort, and sustain them, in those evil days.

The world is a place where innumerable evils abound, of which every one must expect to receive his share, and bear his burden. It was not designed for our home, nor has it accommodations with which an immortal mind can rest, thoroughly satisfied. All this is true; and it is also true, that, there is much good mixed with this evil, and that it is the temper, more than the outward circumstances, which makes us pass our days, agreeably, or disagreeably. There are persons of all ranks, who upon the whole, may be said to be tolerably happy. There are some in eminent stations, who, obedient to God, and useful to mankind, have as much temporal prosperity, as any wise and good man would wish; and there are more who living in silence, and escaping public observation, enjoy a calm, rarely to be found in a higher condition. Men who quietly spend their days, in the service of virtue, and receive from her rewards which are neither felt nor understood by the wicked.

Thus it appears to be, with proper restrictions, a true saying, that, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come."

THE TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD.

JORTIN.

To worship God in spirit and in truth, is to endeavour to imitate and resemble him. A speculative knowledge of God's perfections, will be of small service to us, unless we be deeply and suitably affected by them, and excited to a desire of resembling our heavenly Father in all things, as far as our weakness will permit. His goodness, his long-suffering and mercy in particular, require our imitation. These we should consider as they are in the divine nature, or as they appeared in our Saviour, who became an example more obvious and familiar to our apprehension, and upon which we may more easily form ourselves, and our behaviour. From his doctrine, and practice, we may learn that, to do good, should be our chief care and occupation, and is our greatest glory and honor. To do good to others, when it is advantageous at the same time to ourselves, exposes us to no inconvenience, and is attended with a present reward, even this is right, and in some degree commendable; to do good to those who are poor and unable to return it, or un-

thankful and unwilling to acknowledge it, this is far more excellent; but to do good, and to suffer evil for it, this is the highest pitch to which human virtue can arise.

If we would worship God in spirit, and in truth, we must be attentive when we address ourselves to him, and appear in his presence. This is a duty in which we are often deficient; and our defects of this kind proceed from coldness, and indifference to things sacred, and serious, and from too great a fondness for the world, and for sensible objects. Hence it is that though we know that, we ought at certain times to worship God, and though we observe these times, and meet together for that purpose, we suffer our thoughts to stray, and our imagination to wander through the amusements, and the diversions and affairs of this life. Thus we change the spiritual worship of God into a ceremonial worship, or into something that deserveth not even that name, into something lower and meaner than any part of that ceremonial worship, which the gospel has abolished, as useless and imperfect.

This is not to worship God in spirit and in truth, it is rather not to worship him at all in any sense; it is, to have no notion of his supreme majesty, and authority, and of our own wants, weakness, and dependence, one serious thought of which, might be sufficient to dispel all other thoughts, and to make us as attentive, and as much in earnest, as when we

endeavour to make ourselves acceptable to men, and to acquire some little advantage in our temporal affairs.

The public worship of God is, without question, a necessary and important duty; but as we are often led to it, by motives, not the most commendable, by compliance with custom, by respect for our superiors, by love of reputation, by interest, private worship hath in some respects, the advantage over it, and that intercourse between God and the soul, which is quite concealed from the sight and knowledge of others, is often the sincerest and the truest act of reverence and faith, which we pay to him.

If we accustom ourselves to this secret conversation with God, and preserve that habitual reverence towards him, and that opinion of his perfections, and of our own defects, which the gospel teacheth us to entertain, we shall never fall into that vain and senseless babbling, which our Lord ascribes to the Gentiles. If the heart be duly disposed, words will be ready to express our sentiments. Eloquence is not required of us as necessary to recommend our prayers to our heavenly Father; and yet, if it were required, even in this we need not be deficient; for the affections are always eloquent. If we feel our wants, our wants will teach us to pray; and if we are sensible of benefits received, gratitude will teach us to return thanks.

The true and spiritual worship of God, consists also, in submitting ourselves entirely to his good providence, with patience and contentment, in our station, and acquiescence under it, and an expectation of receiving good things from the hand of God, in that manner, and in that degree, and at that time, whether here or hereafter, which shall seem best to him.

God has so ordered the course of human things, that there is no perfect happiness, no uninterrupted ease, no sincere pleasure in this life; but troubles and sickness, pain, disappointments, losses and sorrows, are scattered up and down here below, and wait for us, and overtake us, in some part or other of our progress through mortality, we shall scarcely ever want opportunities of exercising the patient and submissive virtues of resignation to the will of the Almighty. In all times, and in all circumstances, to rely upon him as upon our great friend and benefactor, and firmly to believe that he orders all, with perfect wisdom and goodness, and that they who love him shall receive from him, whatsoever is expedient for them; this is to honor and worship him, not in words and in pretence, but in deed and in truth, with the heart and understanding, and all the powers of the soul, and to pay him the most rational and the most acceptable service.

ON DEVOTION.

BLAIR.

DEVOTION is the lively exercise of those affections, which we owe to the supreme Being. It comprehends several emotions of the heart, which all terminate on the same great object. It implies a profound veneration of God. By veneration, I understand an affection compounded of awe and love, the affection which, of all others, it best becomes creatures to feel towards their infinitely perfect Creator. Awe, is the first sentiment that rises in the soul, at the view of his greatness. But in the heart of a devout man, it is a solemn and elevating, not a dejecting emotion; for he glows, rather than trembles, in the divine presence. It is not the superstitious dread of unknown power, but the homage yielded by the heart, to him who is at once, the greatest and the best of Beings. Omnipotence, viewed alone, would be a formidable object. But considered in conjunction with the moral perfections of the divine nature, it serves to heighten devotion. Goodness affects the heart with double energy, when residing in one so exalted. The goodness which we adore in him, is not like that which is common among men, a weak, mutable, undiscerning fondness, ill qualified to be the ground of assured trust. It is the goodness of a perfect

governor, acting upon a regular extensive plan; a steady principle of benevolence, conducted by wisdom; which, subject to no *variableness*, or *shadow of turning*, free from all partiality and caprice, incapable of being either soothed by flattery, or ruffled by resentment, resembles, in its calm and equal lustre, the eternal serenity of the highest heavens.

Devotion also implies gratitude to God for all his benefits. This is a warmer emotion than simple veneration. Veneration looks up to the Deity, as he is in himself; gratitude regards what he is towards us. When a devout man surveys this vast universe, where beauty and goodness are every where predominant; when he reflects on these numberless multitudes of creatures who, in their different stations, enjoy the blessing of existence; and when, at the same time, he looks up to an universal Father, who hath thus filled creation with life and happiness, his heart glows within him. He adores that disinterested goodness, which prompted the Almighty to raise up so many orders of intelligent beings, not that he might receive, but that he might give and impart; that he might pour forth himself, and communicate to the spirits which he formed, some emanations of his felicity.

The goodness of this supreme Benefactor, he gratefully contemplates, as displayed in his own state. He reviews the events of his life; and in every comfort which has sweetened it, he discerns

the divine hand. The communication of love from heart, to heart, is an effusion of his goodness. From his inspiration descends all the friendship which ever glowed on earth; and therefore, to him it justly returns in gratitude, and terminates on him.

Devotion also implies, the desire of the soul after the Supreme Being, as its chief good and final rest. To inferior enjoyments, the devout man allots inferior and secondary attachments. He disclaims not every earthly affection. He pretends not to renounce all pleasure in the comforts of his present state. Such an unnatural renunciation, humanity forbids, and religion cannot require. But from these, he expects not his supreme bliss. He discerns the vanity which belongs to them all; and beyond the circle of mutable objects which surround him, he aspires after some principles of more perfect felicity, which shall not be subject to change, or decay.

But where is this complete and permanent good, to be found? Ambition pursues it in courts and palaces; and returns from the pursuit, loaded with sorrows. Pleasure seeks it among sensual joys; and retires with the confession of disappointment. True happiness dwells with God, and from the light of his countenance, it beams upon the devout man. After exploring heaven and earth for happiness, they seem to him a mighty void, a wilderness of shadows, where all would be empty and unsubstan-

tial, without God. But in his favor and love, he finds what supplies every defect of temporal objects; and assures tranquillity to his heart, amidst all the changes of his existence.

From these sentiments and affections, devotion, advances to an entire resignation of the soul, to God. It is the consummation of trust, and hope. It banishes anxious cares, and murmuring thoughts. It reconciles us to every appointment of divine providence; and resolves every wish into the desire of pleasing him, whom our hearts adore. Its genuine breathings are to this effect: "Conduct me, O God! in what path soever seemeth good to thee. In nothing shall I ever arraign thy sacred will. Dost thou require me to part with any worldly advantages, for the sake of virtue and a good conscience? I give them up. Dost thou command me to relinquish my friends, or my country? At thy will, I cheerfully leave them. Dost thou summon me away from this world? Lo! I am ready to depart. Thou hast made, thou hast redeemed me, and I am thine. Myself and all that belongs to me, I surrender to thy disposal."

This, surely, is one of the noblest acts of which the human mind is capable, when thus, if we may be allowed the expression, it unites itself with God. Nor can any devotion be genuine, which inspires not sentiments of this nature. For devotion is not to be considered as a transient glow of affection,

occasioned by some casual impressions of divine goodness, which are suffered to remain unconnected with the conduct of life. It is a powerful principle, which penetrates into the soul; which purifies the affections from debasing attachments: and by a fixed and steady regard to God, subdues every sinful passion, and forms the inclinations to piety and virtue.

Many there are who insist much upon religion being a calm, a sober, and rational principle of conduct. I admit that it is very laudable to have a rational religion. But I must admonish you, that it is both reproachful and criminal, to have an insensible heart. If we reduce religion into so cool a state, as not to admit love, affection, and desire, we shall leave it in possession of small influence over human life. Look abroad into the world, and observe how few act upon deliberate and rational views of their true interest. The bulk of mankind are impelled by their feelings. They are attracted by appearances of good. Taste and inclination rule their conduct. To direct their inclination and taste, towards the highest objects; to form a relish within them, for virtuous and spiritual enjoyment; to introduce religion into the heart is the province of devotion; and hence arises its importance to the interests of goodness.

Of what nature must that man's religion be, who professes to worship God, and to believe in Christ;

and yet raises his thoughts towards God, and his Saviour, without any warmth of gratitude or love? I speak not of those occasional decays of pious affection, to which the best are subject, but of a total insensibility to this part of religion. Surely, let the outward behaviour be ever so irreproachable, there must be some defect in that heart, which remains always unmoved at the view of goodness! The affections cannot in this case, be deemed to flow in their natural channel. Some concealed malignity must have tainted the inward frame. This is not the man, whom you would chuse for your bosom friend; or whose heart you could expect to answer with reciprocal warmth to yours.

As devotion is essential to religion, in its principle, so it enters into the proper discharge of all its duties. It diffuses an auspicious influence over the whole of virtue. The prevailing temper of the mind is formed by its most frequent employments. Intercourse with supreme perfection cannot, therefore, but ennoble and improve it. The pure love of God naturally connects itself with the love of man. Hence devotion has been often found a powerful instrument in humanizing the manners of men, and taming their unruly passions. It smooths what is rough, and softens what is fierce in our nature. It is the great purifier of the affections. It inspires contempt of the low gratifications belonging to animal life. It promotes a humble and cheerful contentment with our lot; and subdues that eager desire

of riches and power, which has filled this unhappy world with crimes and misery. It bestows that enlargement of heart in the service of God, which is the great principle both of perseverance, and of progress in virtue. He who, unacquainted with devout affections, sets himself to keep the divine commandments, will advance in obedience with a slow and languid pace; like one, who, carrying a heavy burden, toils to mount the hill. But he whose heart, devotion, has warmed, will proceed on his way, cheerful and rejoicing. The one performs his duty, only because it is commanded; the other, because he loves it. The one is inclined to do no more than necessity requires; the other seeks to excel. The one looks for his reward in somewhat besides religion; the other finds it in religion itself. It is *his meat and drink, to do the will of that heavenly Father*, whom he loves and adores. Which of these two is likely to make the greatest improvement in goodness, is easily discerned.

Devotion has great influence on the happiness of life. Whatever promotes and strengthens virtue, whatever calms, and regulates the temper, is a source of happiness. Devotion, as I have just now shown, produces, these effects, in a remarkable degree. It inspires composure of spirit, mildness, and benignity; weakens the painful, and cherishes the pleasing emotions; and by these means, carries on the life of a pious man, in a smooth and placid tenour.

Besides exerting this habitual influence on the mind, devotion opens a field of enjoyments, to which the vicious are entire strangers; enjoyments the more valuable, as they peculiarly belong to retirement, when the world leaves us; and to adversity when it becomes our foe. These are the two seasons, for which every wise man, would most wish to provide some hidden store of comfort. For let him be placed in the most favorable situation which the human state admits, the world can neither always amuse him, nor always shield him from distress. There will be many hours of vacuity, and many of dejection in his life. If he be a stranger to God, and to devotion, how dreary will the gloom of solitude often prove! With what oppressive weight will sickness, disappointment, or old age, fall upon his spirits! But for those pensive periods, the pious man, has a relief prepared. From the tiresome repetition of the common varieties of life, or from the painful corrosion of its cares and sorrows, devotion transports him, into a new region; and surrounds him there with such objects, as are the most fitted to cheer the dejection, to calm the tumults, and to heal the wounds of his heart. If the world has been empty and delusive, it gladdens him with the prospect of a higher and better order of things about to arise. If men have been ungrateful and base, it displays before him, the faithfulness of that Supreme Being, who, though every other friend fail, will never forsake him. Consult your experi-

ce and you will find, that the two greatest sources

of inward joy, are, the exercise of love directed towards a deserving object, and the exercise of hope, terminating on some high and assured happiness. Both these are supplied by devotion; and therefore we have no reason to be surprised, if on some occasions, it fills the hearts of good men, with a satisfaction not to be expressed.

To thee, O Devotion! we owe the highest improvement of our nature, and much of the enjoyment of our life. Thou art the support of our virtue, and the rest of our souls, in this turbulent world. Thou composest the thoughts. Thou calmest the passions. Thou exaltest the heart. Thy communications, and thine only, are imparted to the low, no less than to the high; to the poor as well as, to the rich. In thy presence worldly distinctions cease; and under thy influence, worldly sorrows are forgotten. Thou art the balm of the wounded mind. Thy sanctuary is ever open to the miserable; inaccessible only, to the unrighteous, and impure. Thou beginnest on earth, the temper of heaven. In thee, the hosts of angels, and blessed spirits, eternally rejoice.

It is an error to conceive devotion, as requiring an entire retreat from the world. Like every branch of religion, it is intended, to fit us, for discharging the duties of life. We serve God, by being useful to one another. Abstraction from society and total dedication of our time to devout exercises, cannot

be the most proper method of acquiring the favor of God.

Devotion does not enjoin a total contempt of all the pleasures, and amusements of human society. It checks indeed that spirit of dissipation which is too prevalent. It not only prohibits pleasures which are unlawful, but likewise that unlawful degree of attachment to pleasures, in themselves innocent, which withdraws the attention of man, from what is serious, and important. But it brings amusement under due limitation, without extirpating it. It forbids it as the business, but permits it as the relaxation, of life. For there is nothing in the spirit of true religion which is hostile to a cheerful enjoyment of our situation in the world.

Neither does devotion nourish a spirit of severity, in judging of the manners, and characters of others. Under this reproach, indeed, it has so long suffered in the world, that, with too many, the appellation of devout, suggests no other character, but that of a sour, and recluse bigot, who delights in censure. But the reproach is unjust; for such a spirit is entirely opposite to the nature of true devotion. The very first traces, which it imprints on the mind, are, candour, and humility. Its principles are liberal. Its genius is, unassuming and mild. Severe only to itself, it makes every allowance for others which humanity can suggest. It claims no priviledge of looking into their hearts, or of deciding with respect

to their eternal state. If your supposed devotion, produce contrary effects; if it infuse harshness into your sentiments, and acrimony into your speech; you may conclude, that, under a serious appearance, carnal passions lurk. And, if ever it shall so far lift you up with self conceit, as to make you establish your own opinions as an infallible standard for the whole Christian world, and lead you to consign to perdition all who differ from you, either in some doctrinal tenets, or in the mode of expressing them, you may rest assured, that to much pride, you have joined much ignorance, both of the nature of devotion, and of the Gospel of Christ.

Let us remove from devotion all these mistakes, to which the corruptions of men, or their ignorance or prejudices, have given rise. With us, let it be the worship of God, in spirit and in truth; the elevation of the soul towards him, in simplicity and love. Let us pursue it as the principle of virtuous conduct, and of inward peace; by frequent and serious meditation on the great objects of religion, let us lay ourselves open to its influence. By the means of the institutions of the Gospel, let us cherish its impressions. And above all, let us pray to God, that he may establish its power in our hearts. For here, if any where, his assistance is requisite. The spirit of devotion is his gift. From his inspiration it proceeds. Towards him it tends; and in his presence, hereafter, it shall attain its full perfection.

ON THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

BLAIR.

THE divine nature, in some views, attracts our love; in others, commands our reverence; in all, is entitled to the highest attention from the human mind. We never elevate our thoughts in a proper manner, towards the Supreme Being, without returning to our own sphere with sentiments more improved; and if at any time, his greatness oppresses our thoughts, his moral perfections, always afford us relief. His almighty power, his infinite wisdom, and supreme goodness, are sounds familiar to our ears. In his immutability we are less accustomed to consider him; and yet it is this perfection, which, perhaps, more than any other, distinguishes the divine nature from the human; gives complete energy to all its other attributes, and entitles it to the highest adoration. For, hence are derived the regular order of nature, and the steadfastness of the universe. Hence flows the unchanging tenour of those laws which from age, to age, regulate the conduct of mankind. Hence the uniformity of that government, and the certainty of those promises, which are the ground of our trust and security. Goodness could produce no more than feeble and wavering hopes, and power would

command very imperfect reverence, if we were left to suspect that the plans which goodness had framed, might alter, or that the power of carrying them into execution might decrease. The contemplation of God, therefore, as unchangeable in his nature, and in all his perfections, must undoubtedly be fruitful both of instruction, and of consolation to man.

As in his essence, so in his attributes and perfections, it is impossible there can be any change. To imperfect natures only, it belongs to improve and to decay. Every alteration which they undergo in their abilities or dispositions, flows either from internal defect, or from the influence of a superior cause. But as no higher cause, can bring from without, any accession to the divine nature, so within itself, it contains no principle of decay. For the same reason that the self-existent Being, was from the beginning, powerful, and wise, just and good, he must continue unalterably so for ever. Hence, with much propriety, the divine perfections are described in scripture by allusions to those objects to which we ascribe the most permanent stability. *His righteousness is like the strong* MOUNTAINS. *His mercy is in the heavens; and his faithfulness reaches unto the clouds.* These perfections of the divine nature differ widely from the human virtues, which are their faint shadows. The justice of men, is at one time severe, at another time relenting; their goodness is sometimes confined to a partial fondness for a few, sometimes runs out into a blind indulgence

towards all. But goodness and justice, are in the Supreme Being, calm, and steady principles of action, which, enlightened by perfect wisdom, and never either warped by partiality, or disturbed by passion, persevere in one regular, and constant tenour. Among men, they may sometimes break forth with transient splendour, like those wandering fires which illuminate for a little the darkness of the night. But in God, they shine with that uniform brightness, which we can liken to nothing so much as to the untroubled, eternal lustre of the highest heavens.

From this follows, what is chiefly material for us to attend to, that in the course of his operations, towards mankind, in his counsels and decrees, in his laws, his promises, and in his threatenings, there is, *no variableness nor shadow of turning*, with the Almighty. *Known to him, from the beginning were all his works.* In the divine idea the whole system of nature existed, long before the foundations of the earth were laid. When he said, *Let there be light*, he only realised the great plan which, from everlasting, he had formed in his own mind. Foreseen by him, was every revolution which the course of ages was to produce. Whatever the counsels of men can effect, was comprehended in his decree. No new emergency can arise to surprise him. No agitations of anger, or of sorrow, of fear, or of hope, can shake his mind, or influence his conduct. He rests in the eternal possession

of that supreme beatitude, which neither, the virtues, nor the crimes of men can in the least affect. From a motive of overflowing goodness, he reared up the universe. As the eternal lover of righteousness, he rules it. The whole system of his government is fixed; his laws are irrevocable; and, what he once loveth, *he loveth to the end.* In scripture, indeed, he is sometimes said, to *repent*, and to *be grieved.* But such expressions, it is obvious, are employed from accommodations to common conception; in the same manner as when bodily organs are, in other passages, ascribed to God. The scripture, as a rule of life, addressed to the multitude, must make use of the language of men. The divine nature represented in its native sublimity, would have transcended all human conception. Immutability is indeed so closely connected with the notion of supreme perfection, that wherever any rational conceptions of a Deity have taken place, this attribute has been ascribed to him. Reason taught the wise and reflecting in every age to believe, that as what is eternal cannot die, so what is perfect, can never vary, and that the great Governor of the universe, could be no other than an unchangeable Being.

The contemplation of the divine immutability should excite us to admire, and adore. Filled with profound veneration, let us look up to that Supreme Being, who sits upon the universe; moving all things but remaining unmoveable himself; directing

every revolution of the creation, but affected by no revolutions of events, or of time. But amidst all the convulsions of changing and perishing nature, his glory and felicity remain unaltered. The view of great and stupendous objects in the natural world, strikes the mind, with solemn awe. What veneration, then, ought to be inspired, by the contemplation of an object so sublime, as the eternal, and unchangeable Ruler, of the universe! The composure and stillness of thought, introduced by such a meditation, has a powerful tendency, both to purify, and to elevate the heart. It effaces, for a time, those trivial ideas, and extinguishes those low passions, which arise from the circle of vain and passing objects around us. It opens the mind to all the sentiments of devotion, and accompanies devotion, with that profound reverence, which guards it from every improper excess.

When from the adoration of the unchangeable perfection of the Almighty, we return to the view of our own state, the first sentiment which ought naturally to arise, is that of self-abasement. We are too apt to be lifted up, by any little distinctions which we possess; and to fancy ourselves great, only because there are others, whom we consider as less. But what is man, with all his advantages, and boasted powers, before the eternal *Father of Lights?* With God there is no variableness; with man, there is no stability. Virtue and vice, divide the empire of his mind; and wisdom and folly alternately rule

him. Hence he is changeable in his designs, fickle in his friendship, fluctuating in his whole character. His life is a series of contradictions. He is one thing to-day; and another to-morrow; sometimes obliged by experience to alter his purpose, and often led to change it through levity. Variable and unequal himself, he is surrounded with fleeting objects. He is placed as in the midst of a torrent, where all things are rolling by, and nothing keeps its place. He has hardly time to contemplate this scene of vicissitude, before he too, is swept away. Thus circumstanced in himself, and in all the objects with which he is connected, let him be admonished to be humble and modest. Let the contemplation of the unchanging glory of his Creator, inspire him, with sentiments of due submission. Let it teach him to know his proper place; and to check that vanity which is so ready to betray him into guilt.

Let the same meditation affect him with a deep sense of what he owes to the goodness of the Deity. His goodness never appears in so striking a light, as when viewed in connection with his greatness. He who is eternal and immutable, exalted above all, and incapable of receiving returns from any, is the liberal and unwearied giver, of every thing that is good. Let such views of the divine nature, not only call forth gratitude and praise, but prompt us to imitate and adore. Let them show us, that, benevolence is divine, that to stoop from our fancied grandeur, in order to assist, and relieve one another,

is so far from being any degradation of character, that it is our truest honor, and our nearest resemblance to the Father of Lights.

Let the divine immutability become the ground of confidence and trust to good men, amidst all the revolutions of this uncertain world. On the unchangeableness of God, rests the stability of the universe. What we call the laws of nature, are no other than the decrees of the Supreme Being. The same powerful and steady hand, which gave the first impulse to the powers of nature, restrains them from ever exceeding their prescribed time. Hence arises the chief comfort of our present life. We find ourselves in a regular and orderly world. We look forward to a known succession of events. We are enabled to form plans of action. From the cause, we calculate the effect; and from the past, we reason with confidence concerning the future.

But though the great laws of nature be constant like their author, yet in the affairs of men, there is much variety and change. All that regards our present possessions and enjoyments was, for wise reasons, left, in a great measure uncertain; and from this uncertainty arises the distress of human life. Sensible of the changes to which we lie open, we look round with anxious eyes, and eagerly grasp at every object which appears to promise us security. But in vain is the whole circle of human things ex-
ed, with this view. There is nothing on earth,

so stable as to assure us of undisturbed rest, nor so powerful as to afford us constant protection. Time, death, and change, triumph over all the labours of men. What we build up; they incessantly destroy. The public condition of nations, and the private fortunes of individuals, are alike subject to reverses. Life never retains long the same form. Its whole scenery is continually shifting around us. Amidst those endless vicissitudes, what can give any firm consolation, any satisfying rest to the heart, except the dominion of a wise, and righteous Sovereign, *with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.* Though all things change, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as there is fixed and permanent goodness at the head of the universe, we are assured, that the great interests of all good men shall be safe. We know that the Supreme Being loved righteousness, from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to love it, to the last. Under his government, none of these revolutions happen, which have place among the kingdoms of the earth; where princes die; and new sovereigns ascend the throne; new ministers, and new counsels succeed; the whole face of affairs is changed; and former plans fall into oblivion. *But the throne of the Lord is established for ever, and the thoughts of his heart endure to all generations.* We serve the same God, whom our fathers worshipped, and whom our posterity shall adore. His unchanging dominion comprehends all events, and all ages; establishes a connecting principle which

holds together the past, the present, and the future; gives stability to things, which in themselves are fluctuating, and extracts order from those which appear most confused. Well may *the earth rejoice, and the multitude of isles be glad*, because there reigneth over the universe such an immutable Lord!

RELIANCE ON GOD.

JORTIN.

AMONGST the helps, which God has given the children of men, to enable them to pass their days with ease, satisfaction, and tranquillity, is that disposition of mind, which we call, hope; hope, that if things go ill with them, they shall be changed for the better; that if their present condition be tolerably good, it shall so continue. Without this disposition we should be miserable, and with it, we cannot be unhappy; and we are all naturally inclined to admit and cherish it, unless some grievous calamity befall us, or melancholy oppresses us, and sinks our spirits. Now hope is ever accompanied with trust, reliance, and confidence on something, and it is either well, or ill grounded, and it concerns us much, that it rest upon a solid foundation, and that we build not our house upon the sand.

The scriptures direct us to trust in God, and assure us, that all other reliance, is foolish and in-

secure; which will appear, by considering, what there is besides him, on which we are apt to repose our trust.

The good things of this life, which are the objects of our hope, are usually, length of days, health, easy circumstances, reputation, and friends, with a mind capable of enjoying them. These things men hope to obtain and secure. Therefore they sometimes trust in a thing of which they have a confused notion, and which they call, fortune, or chance, which they hope will be always favorable to them. And yet as much evil as good, may be expected from this imaginary deity, allowed to be, a blind goddess, even by her own votaries; so that this reliance is extremely absurd, and is not indeed so properly trust, as thoughtless stupidity, and inconsideration, from which the first untoward accident will awaken them. They trust in the favor of the world, and hope that at least, if they behave themselves well, they shall be well used. But here, they are liable to be often disappointed. They trust in their friends, but these friends may desert them, may want the will, or power to serve them, may be removed far from them, or may die before them. They trust in themselves possibly, that is in their own abilities, caution, forecast, prudence, and diligence; and so far they are much in the right, that it is more reasonable to place a confidence in ourselves, than in other men; for here we are sure at least of a friend; who will never fail and deceive us

willingly. But man finds himself insufficient, for his own happiness, exposed to many evils from without, and from within, and all the advantages, which he possesses of body, of mind, and of fortune, are of such a nature, that he cannot ensure to himself the continuation of them, till the morrow. There remains then nothing, in which we can reasonably trust, except the divine Providence; and here we shall find every thing, that can be required for our satisfaction and security. God is perfectly good, and consummately wise, supremely powerful, constant, unchangeable, and everlasting! Hath frequently and expressly promised, that he will take us under his protection, if we sincerely desire it, and seek it in a proper manner.

If we distrust God's providence, if we cannot bring ourselves, to cast our cares upon him, certainly something is defective and faulty in us, and must be amended; our faith is cold and weak, and our conscience reproaches us for some wilful offences. But reliance should be accompanied, with an observance of God's commandments in general, and also with supplications to him to bless us. Our Saviour, who exhorts us to trust in God, commands us to recommend ourselves to his protection, by first seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and particularly by asking his assistance in all our undertakings. He hath told us, that if we seek, we shall find, and that our heavenly Father, is always ready to give to those who ask him. Be

careful for nothing, but in every thing, in all your affairs, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. This, God requires of us, not as if he wanted to be tanght by us, what is proper for us, nor as if by much persuasion and entreaty, he were to be influenced, to bestow upon us, what else he is not disposed to grant, nor as if he stood in need of our homage, and received any benefit from it; but he hath appointed this method, purely for our sake, and for our good, because prayer to him, keeps up in our minds religious dispositions towards him, honorable thoughts of his power, wisdom, and goodness, and a sense of our perpetual dependence upon him, and natural inability to protect ourselves.

Reliance should also be accompanied with diligence, and prudence in our worldly affairs. If God hath bestowed upon us, health, strength, and natural abilities, it is, that we should make use of them. By giving us the means to provide for ourselves, he hath in effect given us a provision; nor will he work miracles in favor of indiscretion or idleness. As faith without works of goodness will not carry us to heaven, so faith without works of industry, will not carry us, through this world, with any credit and satisfaction.

But reliance on God, excludes immoderate cares, and vain desires, fretful discontent and dissatisfac-

tion; for he who firmly believes that all is ordered for the best, and shall conduce to his happiness, cannot live in slavish subjection to these turbulent passions. If they have a dominion over him, it is a sign, that his faith, and his trust in God, is weak, and unstable. But again, we must not entertain such hard thoughts of our Creator, and Governor, as to imagine, that he will not make all proper allowances, for human weakness. He will not cast us off, because our confidence in him, is sometimes shaken and interrupted, if upon the whole, and in our serious judgment, we fix our hopes upon him, and commit ourselves, our ways, and concerns to him.

Though reliance, will not make a man insensible to trouble, and a stranger to any commotion of mind, yet it will have a considerable effect towards regulating his affections, composing his heart, and producing an acquiescence to the will of God; it will set him free, at least, from these eager desires, and ambitious views, restless apprehensions, foolish troubles, and trifling disappointments, which are the portion of those, who mind nothing besides the things of this world. It is a noble virtue, and a disposition most agreeable to God. He hath made singular promises in favor of it. We are told in scripture, that he careth for, and will sustain them, who cast their cares upon him; that he will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed

upon him; that such shall want nothing, nothing that a wise and good man would desire, whence it plainly appears, how much he values this temper.

It also disposes, and qualifies us to resist many temptations. If at any time, our duty and our worldly interest are inconsistent, and something naturally dear, or useful to us, is to be quitted for the sake of God, a trust in him, and a confidence that he will make up the loss to us in another way, will enable us to choose the better part; and without this persuasion, it is not at all probable, that we shall give him this proof of our obedience. This trust is acceptable to God, because it is the greatest honor, that we can pay to him. By it we shew the belief of his wisdom, knowledge, power, veracity, equity, and goodness, and a belief which is not a barren speculation, but hath a proper influence upon our heart, and our actions. It is a persuasion, that God will protect us through the whole course of our lives, and give us what is expedient for us, though the inconstant state of worldly things, and the many dangers which surround us here below, conspire, and endeavour to raise in us, fears, doubts, and distrust. It is a persuasion, that the state in which we are placed, is the most proper for us, when, if we were to consult only our senses and passions, they would tell us, that it is attended with many inconveniences.

This reliance, where it is in an eminent degree, raises the soul, in a manner above itself, and gives

it in some degree, a resemblance of the invariable nature of its great Author. In this world, nothing is certain, besides uncertainty, and nothing constant, besides inconstancy; but he who relies on God, views these disorders, as one not greatly concerned in them; his circumstances change, and his mind remains the same, stayed upon God, and strengthened against all events.

ON UPRIGHTNESS.

JORTIN.

HAPPINESS, is the favorite wish, and the alluring object, which every living creature pursues; but through the ignorance and the corruption which is so prevalent in the world, it unfortunately comes to pass, that many persons fall into mistakes in their notions of happiness itself, and of the best and surest methods to attain it. In pursuing the end, they are agreed, but in the way of securing it, they differ widely. The choice of these means, shews a man to be wise or foolish, religious or wicked. Every one would be happy, but every one, will not take the proper course to secure that share of happiness, for which he was designed, and which he is capable of obtaining.

The case is this;—every one would be happy, if he could, not only upon the whole, but in each instant of his existence; he would enjoy perpetual

pleasure and satisfaction, without any pain, loss, or disappointment, uneasiness of body, or of mind. These are natural desires, and they seem in some measure, to be common to all living creatures. But man, besides this innate appetite, hath a superior principle in him, which is reason; and reason will inform him, that a happiness of this kind, all pleasure and no pain, all joy and no sorrow, all good and no evil, is unattainable and impossible, and as much out of the course of things, as all light, and no shade, all day and no night, all spring and no winter; and that, discarding such foolish hopes, he must consider what method will secure to him the most satisfaction, and the least disquiet, upon the whole; during his passage through this world, and beyond that period, even through the endless ages of futurity.

The only way to obtain this much desired, and most desirable blessing, is, to walk uprightly. In the language of scripture, the ways of the righteous are called, plain, direct, even ways, which may be found even by the ignorant and where the simple passenger shall not err. Nothing is less difficult, than to know our duty, and our interest also, if there be a sincerity of intention, and an integrity of heart. Our duty is engraven on our minds, and consciences, and we may easily read it there. It is also written in the holy scriptures, and there so plainly expressed, and so frequently inculcated, that without wilful negligence, or stubborn perverseness, we can-

not fail to discover it. The scriptures were calculated for general use; they were intended to make the wise simple, to give the young man knowledge and discretion, and to direct enquirers of all ranks and conditions, in their duty, and towards their happiness. Such are both christian faith, and christian practice, plain and perspicuous so far as they are of universal importance, and of absolute necessity.

He that walketh uprightly, acts upon good moral principles, which will stand the test of the strictest scrutiny, and appear to the more advantage, the more closely they are viewed, and which afford the firmest security. They are recommended to us by the holy scriptures, they have often been visibly rewarded by providence, they are justified by experience, chosen by the wise and good, generally allowed to be agreeable to reason, and profitable in the end; and they have the approbation, not only of the good, but of the bad likewise, who in their melancholy hours, in time of danger, trouble, or sickness, and at the close of life, usually condemn themselves, and bear testimony to the prudence of a conduct, which they once used to blame, or to deride.

The belief of these principles, is absolutely necessary even for upholding civil government, and preserving human society. No obligation upon the consciences of men, no faith and reliance between

them, no friendship and peace, no common honesty, can subsist without it. Therefore princes, and governors, though they should be void of morality and religion, ought at least to pretend to it; and to save appearances, even for the sake of their own lives and fortunes, of their own present welfare; they should, as far as they prudently can, discountenance and repress all attempts to recommend vice, to ridicule virtue, and to overset the belief of a God, a providence, and a future state. Differences of religion are as unavoidable as differences of face and shape, and no man should be molested for his sentiments, when conscience can be fairly, and honestly pleaded; but vice and atheism, have no claims of this kind; and where there is no conscience at all, there can be no plea for it.

All other springs and motives of action, besides reason and religion, are fickle and various. Humor, passion, interest, are perpetually changeable, and depend upon opportunities, casualties, different states and dispositions of body or of mind, and the ceaseless vicissitudes of wordly things. Hence it comes to pass, that he who is conducted by such guides, and governed by such masters, must be unstable in all his ways, and scarcely knows whither he goes, nor enjoys any settled rest of mind. But an upright person in all cases, and in all conditions is the same person, and goes the same way. By this he is secured from diffidence, self distrust, and distraction of mind, from leading an unequal and incon-

sistent life, to his own dissatisfaction, and to the disappointment, and detriment of others.

The way of the upright is pleasant; serenity, satisfaction, and a just confidence, always attend upon him. He is conscious to himself, that his intentions are honest, and that he prosecutes them, by lawful and honorable means. He is thoroughly satisfied, and pleased with all that he undertakes, his judgment acquiesces in it, and approves of it, as worthy of himself, agreeable to his reason, and conformable to his duty. He is secure of this, that the better he is known, the better he will be approved.

The upright person is constant and consistent with himself; his heart and his face, his mind, and his speech, his professions and deeds agree together. He uses no tricks to serve a present turn, he draws no one into mischief for the furtherance of his own ends; he never hath recourse to detraction, dissimulation, flattery, fawning and crouching; his wisdom is tempered with humanity, meekness, and charity; he lies not under perpetual constraint, engaged to keep a constant guard upon himself, to watch his memory, to curb his tongue, to manage his very looks, lest they should betray his intentions. Men do not shun his society; but readily place a confidence in him. He therefore passeth his days with safety, quiet, and reputation.

He is as secure to the final result of affairs, the main end and the considerable purposes of human life. So that if prosperity consists in a satisfaction of mind upon the whole, he cannot fail of being prosperous. No good and wise person will pursue worldy and private interest as an object, which he hath a right to obtain, but will ask and seek it under condition, and with this reserve, if it seem good to the divine wisdom; and then the pains which are employed on any honest purpose, and in an honest way, are not misemployed if they terminate in acquiescence and submission to God's will.

When a man is able to meet temporal and transient disappointments, with such a temper, his loss, is a gain to him. Events which are seemingly undesirable, often produce something incomparably more excellent to the righteous, than any worldly profit, as humility, patience, meekness, moderation, contentedness, and a hope of obtaining a place, in God's kingdom, a small degree of which, is worth all the wealth, all the power, and all the pleasure in the world.

ADVICE TO THE YOUNG.

BLAIR.

SOBRIETY of mind is one of those virtues which the present condition of human life strongly incul-

cates. The uncertainty of its enjoyments, checks presumption; the multiplicity of its dangers, demands perpetual caution. Moderation, vigilence, and self-government, are duties incumbent on all; but especially on such as are beginning the journey of life. To them, therefore, the admonition of St. Paul, *to be sober minded*, is, with great propriety directed; though there is, reason to fear, that by them it is in hazard of being least regarded. Experience enforces the admonition on the most giddy, after they have advanced in years. But the whole state of youthful views and passions, is adverse to sobriety of mind. The scenes which present themselves, at our entering upon the world are commonly flattering. Whatever they be in themselves, the lively spirits of the young, gild every opening prospect. The field of hope, appears to stretch wide before them. Pleasure seems to put forth its blossoms on every side. Impelled by desire, forward they rush, with inconsiderate ardour. Prompt to decide, and to chuse; adverse to hesitate, or to enquire; credulous, because untaught by experience; rash, because unacquainted with danger; headstrong, because unsubdued by disappointment. Hence then arise the perils, of which it is necessary to warn them.

As soon then, as you are capable of reflection, you must perceive, that there is, a right and a wrong, in human actions. You see, that those who are born, with the same advantages of fortune, are

not all equally prosperous, in the course of life. While some of them, by wise and steady conduct, attain distinction in the world, and pass their days, with comfort and honor; others of the same rank, by mean and vicious behaviour, forfeit the advantages of their birth, involve themselves in much misery, and end in being a disgrace to their friends, and a burden to society. Early then, you may learn, that it is not on the external condition in which you find yourselves placed, but on the part, which you are to act, that your welfare, or unhappiness, your honor, or infamy, depend. Now, when beginning to act that part, what can be of greater moment, than to regulate your plan of conduct, with the most serious attention, before you have yet committed any fatal, or irretrievable errors? If, instead of exerting reflection for this valuable purpose, you deliver yourselves up, at so critical a time, to sloth and pleasure; if you refuse to listen, to any counsellor but humor, or to attend to any pursuit, except that of amusement; if you allow yourselves to float loose and careless on the tide of life, ready to receive any direction which the current of fashion may chance to give you, what can you expect to follow from such beginnings? While so many around you, are undergoing the sad consequences of a like indiscretion, for what reason shall not these consequences extend to you? Shall you attain success, without that preparation, and escape dangers, without that precaution, which is required of others? Shall happiness grow up to you of its own accord, and solicit your acceptance, when, to the rest of man-

kind, it is the fruit of long cultivation, and the acquisition of labour and care? Deceive not yourselves with such arrogant hopes.

Be assured, that, whatever your profession is to be, no education is more necessary to your success, than the acquirement of virtuous dispositions and habits. This is the universal preparation for every character, and every station in life. Bad as the world is, respect is always paid to virtue. By whatever arts, you may at first attract the attention, you can hold the esteem, and secure the hearts of others, only by amiable dispositions, and the accomplishments of the mind. These are the qualities whose influence will last, when the lustre of all that once sparkled and dazzled has passed away.

Let not then the season of youth be barren of improvements, so essential to your future felicity and honor. Now is the seed time of life; and according to what *you sow, you shall reap.* Your character is now, under divine assistance, of your own forming; your fate is, in some measure, put into your own hands. Your nature is as yet pliant and soft. Habits have not established their dominion. Prejudices not preoccupied your understanding. The world has not had time, to contract and debase your affections. All your powers are more vigorous, disembarrassed and free, than they will be at any future period. Whatever impulse you now give to your desires and passions, the direction is likely to continue. It will form the channel in

which your life is to run; nay, it may determine its everlasting issue. Consider then the employment of this important period, as the highest trust which shall ever be committed to you; as, in a great measure, decisive of your happiness, in time, and in eternity.

Of all the virtues most necessary to be cultivated in youth, piety to God, is the most important, both as a foundation of good morals, and as a disposition particularly graceful and becoming in the young. To be void of it, argues a cold heart, destitute of some of the best affections which belong to that age. Youth is the season of warm and generous emotions. The heart should then, spontaneously, rise into the admiration of what is great, glow with the love of what is fair and excellent, and melt at the discovery of tenderness and goodness. Where can any object be found so proper to kindle those affections, as the Father of the universe! The author of all felicity? Unmoved by veneration, can you contemplate that grandeur and majesty, which his works every where display? Untouched by gratitude, can you view that profusion of good, which in this pleasing season of life, his beneficent hand pours around you? Happy in the love and affection of those with whom you are connected, look up to the Supreme Being, as the inspirer of all the friendship, which has ever been shown you by others; himself, your best and your first friend; formerly, the supporter of your infancy,

and the guide of your childhood; now, the guardian of your youth, and the hope of your coming years. View religious homage, as a natural expression of gratitude to him, for all his goodness. Consider it as the service of the *God of your fathers;* of him, to whom your parents devoted you; of him, whom in former ages your ancestors honored; and by whom they are now rewarded and blessed in heaven. Connected with so many tender sensibilities of soul, let religion be with you, not the cold and barren offspring of speculation, but the warm and vigorous dictate of the heart.

ON OUR IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF A FUTURE STATE.

BLAIR.

EXPOSED as we are at present to such a variety of afflictions, and subjected to so much disappointment in all our pursuits of happiness, why, it may be said, has our gracious Creator denied us the consolation of a full discovery of our future existence, if indeed such an existence be prepared for us? Reason, it is true, suggests many arguments in behalf of immortality: Revelation gives full assurance of it. Let us attempt humbly to trace the reasons why, though permitted to know and to see, somewhat of the eternal world, we are never-

theless permitted only to *know in part and to see through a glass darkly.*

Consider the nature and circumstances of man. Introduced into the world in an indigent condition, he is supported at first by the care of others; and as soon as he begins to act for himself, finds labour and industry necessary for sustaining his life, and supplying his wants. Mutual defence and interest give rise to society; and society when formed, requires distinctions of property, diversity of conditions, subordinations of ranks, and a multiplicity of occupations, in order to advance the general good. The services of the poor, and the protection of the rich, become reciprocally necessary. The governors and the governed, must co-operate for general safety. Various arts must be studied; some respecting the cultivation of the mind, others the cares of the body; some to ward off the evils, and some to provide the conveniences of life. In a word, by the destination of his Creator, and the necessities of his nature, man commences at once, an active, not merely a contemplative being. Religion assumes him as such. It supposes him employed in this world, as on a busy stage. It regulates, but does not abolish, the enterprises and cares of ordinary life. It addresses itself to the various ranks in society; to the rich and the poor, to the magistrate and the subject. It rebukes the slothful; directs the diligent how to labour; and requires every man to do his own business.

Suppose now that veil to be withdrawn which conceals another world from our view. Let all obscurity vanish; let us no longer *see darkly, as through a glass;* but let every man enjoy that intuitive perception of divine and eternal objects, which the sceptic may be supposed to desire. The immediate effect of such a discovery would be, to annihilate in our eye, all human objects, and to produce a total stagnation in the affairs of the world. Were the celestial glory exposed to our admiring view; did the angelic harmony sound in our enraptured ears; what earthly concerns would have the power of engaging our attention for a single moment? All the studies and pursuits, the arts and labours which now employ the activity of man, which support the order, or promote the happiness of society, would lie neglected and abandoned. Those desires and fears, those hopes and interests, by which we are at present stimulated, would cease to operate. Human life would present no objects sufficient to rouse the mind; to kindle the spirit of enterprize; or to urge the hand of industry. If the mere sense of duty engaged a good man to take some part in the business of the world, the task, when submitted to, would prove distasteful. Even the preservation of life would be slighted, if he were not bound to it by the authority of God. Impatient of his confinement within this tabernacle of dust, languishing for the happy day of his translation to these glorious regions which were displayed to his sight, he would sojourn on earth as a melancholy exile. Whatever providence has pre-

pared for the entertainment of man, would be viewed with contempt. Whatever is now attractive in society, would appear insipid. In a word, he would be no longer a fit inhabitant of this world, nor be qualified for those exertions which are allotted to him in his present sphere of being. But, all his faculties being sublimated above the measure of humanity, he would be in the condition of a being of superior order, who, obliged to reside among men, would regard their pursuits with scorn, as dreams, trifles, and puerile amusements of a day.

From this it appears that no reasonable objection to the belief of a future state arises from the imperfect discoveries of it, which we enjoy; from the difficulties that are mingled with its evidence; from our *seeing as through a glass darkly, and being left to walk by faith, and not by sight.* It cannot be otherwise, it ought not to be otherwise, in our present state. The evidence which is afforded, is sufficient for the conviction of a candid mind, sufficient for a rational ground of conduct; though not so striking as to withdraw our attention from the present world, or altogether to overcome the impression of sensible objects. In such evidence it becomes us to trust, without indulging either doubts or complaints, on account of our not receiving all the satisfaction which we fondly desire, but which our present immaturity of being excludes. For, upon the supposition of immortality, this life is no other

than the childhood of existence; and the measure of our knowledge must be proportioned to such a state. To the successive changes of human life, from infancy to old age, belong peculiar attachments, certain cares, desires, and interests; which open not abruptly, but by gradual advances on the mind, as it becomes fit to receive them, and is prepared for acting the part to which, in their order, they pertain. Hence, in the education of a child, no one thinks of inspiring him all at once with the knowledge, the sentiments, and views of a man, or with contempt for the exercises and amusements of childhood. On the contrary, employments suited to his age, are allowed to occupy him. This illustrates the present conduct of the Deity towards man. Under the care of the Almighty, our education is now going on, from a mortal to an immortal state. As much light is let in upon us, as we can bear without injury. When the objects become too splendid and dazzling for our sight, the curtain is drawn. Exercised in such a field of action, as suits the strength of our unripened powers, we are at the same time, by proper prospects and hopes, prompted to aspire towards the manhood of our nature, the time when *childish things shall be put away*. But still, betwixt those future prospects, and the impression of present objects, such an accurate proportion is established, as on the one hand shall not produce a total contempt of earthly things while we aspire to those that are heavenly; and on the other, shall not en-

courage such a degree of attachment to our present state, as would render us unworthy of future advancement.

Let these reflections not only remove the doubts which may arise from our obscure knowledge of immortality, but likewise produce the highest admiration of the wisdom of our Creator. Checking our inquisitive solicitude about what the Almighty hath concealed, let us diligently improve what he hath made known. Inhabitants of the earth, we are at the same time candidates for heaven. Looking upon these as only different views of one consistent character, let us carry on our preparation for heaven, not by abstracting ourselves from the concerns of this world, but by fulfilling the duties and offices of every station in life.

ON THE EVIDENCE OF A FUTURE STATE.

BLAIR.

THE different kinds of evidence upon which our faith of a happy immortality is grounded, is a subject in itself, important and pleasing, to all good men.—The dissolution of the earthly tabernacle at death, affords no ground for thinking that the soul, at the same time perishes, or is extinguished. The soul and the body, are at present united by the closest sympathy. When one suffers, the other is

affected. Both seem to grow up together to the maturity of their powers; and together both seem often to decay. Such a shock is apparently suffered by the soul at death, as at first view might lead us to suspect that it was sharing the same fate with the body. Notwithstanding this, there are clear proofs, that the body and the soul, though at present closely connected by divine appointment with one another, are, however substances of different and dissimilar natures. Matter, of which the body is composed, is a substance, altogether dead and passive, and cannot be put in motion, without some external impulse. Whereas the soul hath, within itself, a principle of motion, activity, and life. Between the laws of matter, and the action of thought, there is so little resemblance, or rather so much opposition, that mankind in general have agreed in holding the soul to be an immaterial substance; that is a substance, the nature of which we cannot explain or define farther, than that it is a substance quite distinct from matter, This being once admitted, it clearly follows, that since thought depends not on matter, from the dissolution of the material part, we have no ground to infer the distruction of the thinking part of man.

So far then from supposing that the soul must cease to act on the dissolution of the body, it seems rather to follow, that it will then act in a more perfect manner. In its present habitation, it is plainly limited and confined in its operations. When it is

let loose from that earthly house; it is brought forth into greater liberty.

If the soul were to perish after the body dies, the state of man would be altogether unsuitable to the wisdom and perfection of the Author of his being. Man would be the only creature that would seem to have been made in vain. All the other works of God are contrived to answer exactly the purposes for which they were made. They are either incapable of knowledge at all; or, they know nothing higher than the state in which they are placed. Their powers are perfectly suited and adjusted to their condition. But it is not so with man. He has every appearance of being framed for something higher and greater, than what he here attains. He sees the narrow bounds within which he is here confined; knows and laments all the imperfections of his present state. His thirst for knowledge, his desire of happiness, all stretch beyond his earthly station. He searches in vain for adequate objects to gratify him. His nature is perpetually tending and aspiring towards the enjoyment of some more complete felicity than this world can afford. In the midst of all his researches and aspirations, he is suddingly cut off. He is but of yesterday, and to-morrow is gone. Often in the entrance, often in the bloom of life, when he had just began to act his part, and to expand his powers, darkness is made to cover him.—Can we believe, that when this period is come, all is finally over with the best and

the worthiest of mankind? Endowed with so noble an apparatus of rational powers, taught to form high views and enlarged desires, were they brought forth for no other purpose, than to breathe this gross and impure air for a short space, and then to be cut off from all existence? All his other works, God hath made in *weight, number, and measure;* the hand of the Almighty artificer every where appears. But on man, his chief work here below, he would, upon this supposition, appear to have bestowed no attention; and after having erected a stately palace in this universe, framed with so much magnificence, and decorated with so much beauty, to have introduced man, in the guise of a neglected wanderer, to become its inhabitant.

The confused and promiscuous distribution of good and evil in this life, is also a farther argument in favor of a future state. The enjoyments of the world, such as they are, are far from being always bestowed on the virtuous and the worthy. On the contrary, the bitterest portion is often their lot, while ease and affluence are allowed to the ungodly. I must ask, if such an arrangement of things, owing to the ordination, or at least the permission of providence, be consonant to any ideas we can form of the wisdom and goodness, of a Supreme Ruler, on the supposition of there being no future state?—But as soon as the immortality of the soul, and a state of future retribution are established, all difficulties vanish; the mystery is unravelled; supreme wisdom,

justice, and goodness, are discovered to be only concealed for a little while behind the veil.

But though these reasonings to prove the immortality of the soul, and a future state, are certainly of great weight, yet in a point so momentous to us, as our existence after death, we never could, with absolute certainty, and full satisfaction, have rested on any evidence except what was confirmed by the declaration of God himself. For many and high blessings we are indepted to the christian revelation; for none more than for its having brought life and immortality to light. The revelations made by God to the world in early ages, gave the first openings to this great article of faith and hope. In future periods the light dawned more and more; but it was not until the sun of righteousness arose by the appearance of Christ on earth, that the great discovery was completed. Then indeed, were made known the *city of the living God, the new Jerusalem* above, the *mansions* prepared for the *spirits of just men made perfect.* Christ was authorised to say, *I give unto my sheep eternal life. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.* Accordingly he lay down in the grave; rose as *the first fruits of them that slept;* and ascending into heaven, entered there within the veil, as the forerunner of his followers, to assure them of all being friendly and well disposed towards them in those upper regions. All therefore who live and die in

the faith and obedience of Jesus, are entitled to say with the Apostle, *we know*;—not only we hope and we reason, but *we know*,—that, *if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

THE LOVE OF THE WORLD.

JORTIN.

If by the world we understand the earth which we inhabit, and all those who dwell with us, and the things which surround us, and all that we can possess during our abode here, the conveniences of life, and all the objects of our senses, we must suppose, that when we are commanded in a general and unlimited manner, not to love these things, the meaning is, that we must not love them too much: for there is a frequent manner of speaking in scripture, according to which, things are forbidden absolutely, which are only to be understood comparatively. Love not the world, that is, love it not immoderately, and so far as to prefer things transitory, to things eternal.

We love the world too much, when for the sake of any profit or pleasure, we wilfully, knowingly, and deliberately transgress the commandments of

God, and become vicious, and live addicted to sensuality, intemperance, fraud, extortion, or injustice. And also when we take more pains to secure the conveniences of this life, than to qualify ourselves for the rewards of the next.

We are without doubt, made for this world, and the world for us, and the good things, the comforts and conveniences which it contains, are usually placed in our view, and within our reach, as both an excitement and a recompense of our honest industry. They are called in scripture, gifts of God, which when he sees proper, he bestows upon his servants. They may therefore be lawfully sought, and lawfully possessed. This we know well enough, and we can practise all that is suitable to this knowledge in providing for our subsistence, and seldom fail in it for want of inclination; but often we forget a much more important truth, that this world is a passage to the next, that our present state lasts a few days, and the next for ever; that in the future, the eternal and unchangeable state, we cannot be happy, unless we carry hence with us, a mind purified from evil inclinations, and capable of delighting in goodness. Forgetting these truths, and suffering the objects of the senses to take possession of our hearts, we are perpetually occupied in pursuing things temporal and transitory, as if there were no hereafter, as if we were to live here for ever, as if our soul were the only safe, and the only trifling thing about us.

This is to have an undue affection for the world, and not to regard the precept of our Master, who hath directed us to seek in the first place, the *kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof.* We also love the world too much, when we cannot be contented, patient and resigned, under low or inconvenient circumstances. We can readily and cheerfully submit, in our temporal concerns, to a present loss or hardship, and forego a present good, when we are encouraged by the prospect of a considerable advantage, which may be thus, and cannot be otherwise obtained. If therefore we repine, and murmur, and afflict ourselves beyond measure, when things fall not out according to our expectations, we plainly shew that, we account temporal prosperity to be the greatest of all blessings; we behave ourselves, as if we imagined, that God himself could not make us amends, and repay these disappointments with more valuable favors. The religion we profess, if it hath due influence upon us, will teach us to account the light of his countenance, the remission of sins, peace of mind, and the hope of eternal life, to be infinitely superior to all that this fleeting world can bestow; will teach us to seek them with the utmost assiduity, and then if our present situation and state be not such as we, perhaps, should chuse for ourselves, to bear it decently; remembering that this hath often been the condition of the worthiest persons; of the best servants of God; that to them it is rather an earnest of future happiness, than a mark of divine displeasure; that

Christ bequeathed, distress, and slights and affronts, as a legacy to his disciples. A Christian, therefore, in the lowest condition may find resources of support and consolation, and may say to himself; I am not poorer, and more afflicted, more dispised, or calumniated, than the Son of God was. It can be no intolerable evil, and no real disgrace to resemble him; he hath given a kind of dignity and lustre to adversity, by condescending to adopt and undergo it.

When we cannot part with any thing that we possess, to those who want it, who deserve it, and who indeed, have a right to it; when we envy those who are more fortunate, and more favored by the world than we are, and cannot behold their success without repining; when we honor and esteem and favor persons, purely according to their birth, fortunes, and success, measuring our judgment and approbation, by their outward appearance and situation in life; when worldly prosperity makes us proud, vain, and arrogant; when we dislike, slight, and dispise others, only because the world favors them not, because they are in a low condition; in all these instances we may be said to love the world too much.

The pleasures of society and of friendship and the things which conduce to our present ease and satisfaction, to the improvement of our minds, and to the support of our body, and even riches, honors,

and power, when they are not bought too dear, at the expence of something more valuable, and when we employ them as we ought, are not forbidden by the precept, which enjoins us, not to love the world. There are things relating to the present life, convenient for us during our abode here below, such as liberty, health, food, raiment, a state of independence, reputation, friends, and relations. The love of these things is natural, nor doth religion forbid this love; but only limits and moderates it. It commands to love them rationally, and with a due subordination to objects more excellent, and of greater concern to us, and to prefer the favor of God, the cause of virtue, the good of mankind, and our own eternal welfare, to all these precarious possessions.

God hath with great wisdom and kindness so ordered things, that there should be nothing here below, fit to engross and inslave our hearts. Happy is it for us, that it is so; for how should we dote on the world, if it always favored us, when we love it still, false and ungrateful as it is!—With all its imperfections it is too dear to us, though we see them, and feel them.

Lest the wicked world should seduce us, such is the appointed course of causes and effects, that all extravagant desires, all vicious dispositions, all unlawful pleasures, bring with them, or draw after them, innumerable evils, bodily distempers, uneasi-

ness of mind, poverty, shame, remorse, disgrace, hatred and enmity. Not only the vicious, but even the innocent pleasures of this world, are empty and deceitful in some respects. Life itself, the fountain and foundation of them all, is most uncertain. Health, without which, life is not life, is soon and easily, and irretrievably lost. The days of our abode here are few; the days of our youth and strength still fewer. The public welfare, and our own private possessions are precarious, and exposed to many dangers. Our friends and relations are sometimes removed far from us, sometimes fall into calamities from which we cannot deliver them, sometimes die before us, sometimes prove ungrateful and unkind.

These are undoubtedly evils, but evils out of which good may arise; they are harsh and severe instructors, but they teach useful knowledge; they are distasteful remedies, but they remove dangerous distempers. They are designed to make us modest, and humble in prosperity, and patient in adversity, careful to secure to ourselves an inheritance in heaven, and indifferent to every thing that of its own nature is changeable and transitory. When these profitable effects are produced in us, we are not only disposed and qualified to live hereafter with God, and good beings, but to enjoy at present all the happiness that ought to be expected in this state of trial and discipline.

ON ANGER.

JORTIN.

WHAT is the reason why men are angry? We shall usually find it to be, because they think that another hath injured them. And what is it that their anger prompts them to do? To return evil for evil, to revenge themselves, and to make the offender suffer for his behaviour. Anger then is an offence taken at a real or supposed injury, attended with a desire of revenging it. Though anger is forbidden as unlawful, yet there are passages in scripture, whence it may be concluded, that it is not *always* a sin.

The passion of anger, is at first, an offence taken at an ill behaviour, an emotion of mind raised at the sense of injuries done to us, or others. This is a passion belonging to our nature, and no sin viewed in this light, and confined to this description; but when this offence, leads us to intentions of revenge, as it frequently doth, when it is raised upon slight provocation, and without just cause, when it hurries us into indecencies, when it is suffered to lodge in our minds, and to turn to a confirmed hatred and malice, it becomes a fault. Our passions were implanted in us for good purposes; they seem to be necessary to us as springs of action, and without

them the mind would be dull and stupid, given up to indolence.

The use of anger is, to stir us up to self-preservation, and to put us upon our guard against injuries. When it hath done this, it has performed all that belongs to it; for what measures we may take to effect this, how we may secure ourselves, and how we should behave towards those who offend us, these are points, concerning which, we must not consult our *passions*, but our *reason*, which was given us, to moderate our passions, and to prescribe laws for our actions.

Amongst many motives which should induce us to moderate and restrain our passions, this is one, that whensoever we suffer them to exceed their bounds, they constantly put us to pain; so that for our own interest, we find it necessary to keep them in subjection. This is plainly the case with anger, which while it lasts is a most uneasy passion. They who are under its dominion are like the troubled sea; their thoughts are in an unnatural and violent commotion, they can take no satisfaction in any thing; they can apply themselves to no business, and to no amusement. A painful memory of injuries received, a violent abhorrence of those who have offended them, a fierce desire of revenge, an anxious impatience until it be accomplished, all join together to afflict them. Thus do they use themselves as ill as even their worst enemies could wish.

Anger also makes us contemptible or odious to those with whom we converse. This passion is difficult to be concealed and dissembled; and he who is subject to it frequently discovers it to all who come in his way. He will therefore be slighted and shunned by those who have no particular obligations to him; for anger, with the follies, rudeness, noise, malice, and the impertinence which attend it, is highly disagreeable to us. We dislike it in others, though we can overlook and excuse it in ourselves.

The excess of this passion is to be cured, by a resolution, to restrain it, which must arise from a persuasion that it is our duty, and our interest so to act. A right use of reason therefore, is the only remedy. It may perhaps be said, that this is a remedy, which seems good, but is found to be useless upon trial. Such persons in their cooler hours, know the evil, and the pernicious nature of anger, see it plainly, and acknowledge it readily; but upon sudden provocations, anger takes sudden possession of them, and banishes all reason from their minds, and thus when they want it most, they have it least. But that the passions may be kept in due bounds, by a timely use of reason, is true both in appearance, and in fact, and also that by the same means, they may be restrained, though they have formerly been unlawfully indulged. Whosoever begins early to exert his dominion over them, will rule them without great difficulty. When they have been long uncontrolled, it is very hard to regulate

them, and much labour and resolution are requisite. But labour and resolution will conquer stubborn difficulties, and men ought not to be discouraged in such cases, if they find the progress slow.

They who are greatly subject to anger, have many intervals, in which they are free from it; for no one is *always* angry. When therefore their understanding is sedate and untroubled, they should consult their own reason, and reason if they hearken patiently to it, will offer them remedies. They must reflect on the serious effects and consequences of sinful anger, what a restless, fretful, and tormenting passion it is, how much it disgraces them, by its deformity, how it causes them to be scorned and slighted by their acquaintance and friends, how it produces injurious language, malicious calumny and acts of violence, how contrary it is, to that benevolent disposition, which the gospel requires from every Christian. These things if they are frequently considered, and seriously called to mind, will certainly restrain immoderate anger. Fear, shame, and self-love, will always oppose themselves to anger, and deter us from it. An intimate acquaintance with our defects is also a remedy. The remembrance of our own faults, ought to check our anger, we know that we frequently offend, and require forgiveness, why then should any one expect more from others, than he would give them leave to require from him?

We must resolve with ourselves, not to give way to anger upon trifling provocations. If we could upon all such occasion be masters of our temper, we should not often be provoked; for they who are frequently angry, are so because they are disturbed at very trifles. By learning thus to resist smaller temptations to anger, we shall be able at least to receive greater injuries, not unmoved indeed and unconcerned, but neither seeking nor wishing for revenge, losing our peace of mind, or making ourselves miserable.

And if we could consider calmly and seriously, without prejudice and partiality, what are those offences which ought to be esteemed small and unworthy of notice, and unfit to raise our wrath; we should find that the greater part of affronts, wrongs, and indignities, as we call them, are of this nature, that we make them grievous, by thinking too well of ourselves, and too ill of others, or setting too high a value upon things, on which our happiness does not, or *ought* not to depend.

Anger must be resisted, and restrained, in all its beginnings, before it acquires strength, and breaks out into extravagance. When we can stop this passion in its rise, from breaking out into acts of violence, or injurious language, we have made no small progress in the government of ourselves, and may hope by care and resolution, to become masters of our temper.

The art of governing the passions is more useful and more important, than many things in the search and pursuit of which we spend our days. They all have their use, but they are only useful, when, they are under the dominion of reason. If they are suffered to break loose from that state of subjection, they promise pleasure, but always give pain.

ON A SENSE OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE.

BLAIR.

THE belief of the divine presence, acts upon the good man, as an incitement to virtue. The presence of one whom we highly esteem and revere, of a sovereign for instance, a father, or a friend, whose approbation we are solicitous to gain, is always found to exalt the powers of men, to refine and improve their behaviour. Hence it has been given as a rule, by ancient moralists, that in order to excel in virtue, we should propound to ourselves some person of eminent and distinguished worth; and should accustom ourselves to act as if he were standing by and beholding us. To the esteem and approbation of their fellow creatures none are insensible. There are few who, in the conspicuous parts of their life, when they know the eyes of the public to be fixed on them, act not their part with propriety and decorum. But what is the observa-

tion of the public; what is the presence of the greatest or wisest men on earth, to that presence of the Divinity which constantly surrounds us? The man who realizes to his mind this august presence, feels a constant incentive for acquitting himself with dignity. He views himself as placed on an illustrious theatre. To have the Almighty for the spectator and witness of his conduct, is more to him, than if the whole world were assembled to observe him. Men judge often falsely, always imperfectly, of what passes before them. They are imposed on by specious appearances; and the artful carry away the praise which is due to the deserving. Even supposing them to judge fairly, we may want the opportunity of doing justice to our character, by any proper display of it, in the sight of the world. Our situation may bury in obscurity, those talents, and virtues which were entitled to command the highest esteem. But he, in whose presence the good man acts, is both an impartial, an unerring judge of worth. No fallacious appearances impose on him. No secret virtue is hidden from him. He is attentive equally to the meanest and the greatest; and his approbation confers eternal rewards.

Every minute diversity of character, temper, and situation, is known to God. It is not only from what his servants do, but from what they *seek* to do, that he forms his judgment of them. He attends to all those circumstances, which render the trial of their virtue, at any time peculiarly difficult. He

hears the whisper of devotion as it rises in the soul. He beholds the tear of contrition which falls in secret. He sees the good intention struggling in its birth; and pursues it, in its progress, through those various obstacles which may prevent it from ripening into action. Good men therefore, in their most humbled and dejected state, draw some consolation from his knowledge of their hearts. Though they may sometimes have erred from the right path, they may look up to him who is ever with them, and say as an Apostle who had grievously offended, once said to his master, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

In prosperity, the good man dwells with a friend and protector, from whence he conceives his blessings to proceed. He can appeal to him for the thankfulness with which he receives them; and for his endeavours to employ them well. He trusts that the God whom he serves will not forsake him; that the goodness which he has already experienced, will continue to bless him; and though he believes himself not exempted from the changes of the world, yet, in the midst of these, he has ground to hope, that sources of comfort and happiness shall always be left open to him.

In the smiling scenes of nature, he contemplates the benignity of its Author. In its sublime objects, he admires his majesty. In its awful and terrible ones, he adores his power. He dwells in this

world, as in a magnificent temple; which is full of the glory of its founder; and every where views nature offering up its incense to him, from a thousand altars. Such ideas exalt, and ennoble the human mind; and reflect additional lustre on the brightness of prosperity.

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In an obscure or afflicted situation of life there is no relief equal to that, which a virtuous and holy man derives, from a sense of the perpetual presence of God. Is he without friends to assist him, or any to regard and consider his estate? He enjoys the satisfaction of thinking, that though he may be neglected by men, he is not forgotten of God. Inconsiderable as he is in himself, he knows that he shall not be overlooked by the Almighty, amidst the infinite variety of being; or lost in the immensity of his works. The poor man can, with as much encouragement as the rich or great, lift up his eyes to heaven, and say, *Nevertheless, O Lord, I am continually with thee: Thou holdest me by my right hand.* The gracious presence of that Supreme Being, is affected by no diversity of rank or fortune. It imparts itself alike, to all the virtuous and upright; like its glorious image, the sun in the firmament, which sheds its rays equally upon the humble cottage, and upon the palace of kings. In the presence of the great Lord of heaven and earth, all distinctions, which vanity has contrived to make among men, totally disappear. All ranks are on one level. *The rich and the poor* here indeed, *meet*

together, without any other distinction than what arises from the heart and the soul. The sense of this lifts the poor man above contempt. He can enjoy himself with pleasure in his mean habitation, because he believes, that God dwells with him there. The divine presence cheers to him, the most lonely retreat. It accompanies his steps to the most distant regions of the earth. If he should be driven into exile from all his friends, and obliged to dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there God's hand would hold him, and his right hand would guide him. Though left without companion or friend, he never thinks himself desolate, as long as he can say, *I am still with God.*

Thus the divine presence animates and strengthens virtue. It enlivens prosperity. Under various forms of adversity, it affords consolation and relief. While some affect to treat all considerations, taken from the sense of the Divine presence, as visionary and enthusiastic, it can on the contrary, be clearly shown, that they are founded on the most certain and unquestionable principles of reason. They essentially belong not to revealed only, but to natural religion. Their reality can be denied by none, but those who deny that God exists, or that he governs the world. For if he exist, he must undoubtedly pervade and inspect the world which he governs. He must know what is going on throughout his own universe; and especially must know what passes within the hearts which he has made, and of which he is to judge.

To be every where present, is the attribute of his nature, which, of all others, is the most necessary to his administration of the universe. This accordingly is an attribute which all religions have ascribed to him. All nations have believed in it. This attribute being once admitted to belong to the Deity, the consequences deduced from it, naturally follow: and every good man has ground to say, *O Lord, I am continually with thee.*

ON FAITH.

JORTIN.

FAITH in itself is a belief of the revelation which God hath made known to us, by his Son, entertained upon just grounds. It is a belief that God sent his Son into the world, to save and instruct us; it is a belief that the doctrines taught by our Lord are true; that we ought to practice what he requires from us, the substance of which is, that we must live soberly, righteously, and godly, because there is a time appointed, when he will judge mankind, and reward his servants. As the motives to religion arise principally from things future and invisible, faith is therefore said to be the substance, or well grounded expectation of things not seen. It is not only a belief of these things, but a belief of them entertained upon sufficient evidence. For if we assent, without a reason, this cannot properly be called

faith. It is rather credulity, prejudice, or positiveness. Such an imperfect faith, which though it have a right object, hath no foundation, will probably be unsteadfast, and unfruitful, or productive of nothing that is good. Such a belief cannot be acceptable to God, who requires to be served, not only by the lips, but by the understanding. He gave us an understanding, and he expects, that we should use it. When therefore any thing is proposed to our assent, as coming from him, we dishonor the abilities which he has conferred upon us, if we believe without an enquiry whether he be the author of such a revelation.

Thus faith is a belief of the revelation which God has made to us by his Son, entertained upon just grounds. And this belief may be considered to be so, when we know what that revelation requires from us, and when we have sufficient evidence that it is a divine revelation.

Every person when he searches the scriptures that he may learn his duty, ought to separate what is plain and easy from that which is intricate and obscure, and to conclude that these plainer things are his principal concern. The evidence of our religion rests partly upon the goodness of its precepts, and the importance of its doctrines; and partly, not indeed upon the evidence of sense, but upon the testimony of numerous and most unexceptionable witnesses *who had such evidence.*

The Apostles wrought kind and beneficial miracles, taught men to repent, to live good lives, to love and obey God, to love and assist one another, to expect a state of retribution; and they wrote treatises and epistles for the instruction of their brethren. The argument for the truth of the Christian religion, which is taken from its excellence and importance, is not only adapted to every capacity, but is wonderfully persuasive and full of conviction. The more it is examined and the nearer it is viewed, the greater is its lustre, and the fairer its appearance. The doctrines of the gospel will ever be found amiable, useful, and necessary, tending to compose our passions, to improve our minds, to make us obedient to God, good magistrates, good subjects, good friends, good parents, good children, and serviceable to all in our several stations. The gospel discovers to us, what human unassisted reason could never have discerned; it promises more than we could have expected, and it alarms us with those just fears of God's displeasure, which together with pious hopes, are the offsprings of action, and incentives to well doing. A religion thus intrinsically excellent, and thus supported, ought to be received with thankfulness, and held fast without wavering.

The completion of a great variety of prophecies contained both in the Old and New Testament, is another ground of our christian faith; several of which are very clear and circumstantial; and the

event, which is the great unfolder of predictions, has sufficiently explained them to us; and when they are considered as a system or chain of prophecies, all tending to one and the same end, they give strength and light to each other, and the argument built upon them acquires more weight and stability.

There is a faith which is only an habitual and historical belief of religion, a faith which dwells in the memory or understanding, but has no influence on the heart. They in whom this faith is found, disbelieve not the gospel, nor call it in question; they assent to it, as they assent to many other facts and truths upon which they never meditate and reflect. There is also a faith which is, an active faith, which embraces and receives God's revealed will, the affirmations, the promises, the threats, and the commands contained in it, assenting to the affirmations and doctrines, depending upon the promises, fearing the threatenings with a religious awe, and resolving firmly and sincerely to obey the commandments. This faith is not separable from good works: the former may have a place in the most vicious and corrupted minds.

THE DUTY OF EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES.

JORTIN.

SINCE faith is founded on a knowledge of God's revealed will, every person has a right to examine the scriptures, and to determine for himself. This indeed will make every man a judge of his religion, and of the doctrine of his teachers, which is said by some to be a pernicious liberty, producing errors and heresies; and the same may be said of all God's blessings, and of all our powers and abilities, namely, that they may be abused and misapplied; therefore such objections are not just.

Every Christian, is obliged, according to his abilities and opportunities, to acquaint himself with his duty, and to use all the helps which God vouchsafes to him, such as a knowledge of the scriptures, prayers to God, a careful shunning of evil, and of acting against his own conscience, an attendance upon the public worship of God, a benevolent and charitable disposition, humility, and a due sense of offences, and unworthiness, repentance, faith, and a sober and serious temper. If a man act not thus, how can he expect the blessing of God, and the divine assistance?

As every one in performing this duty of examining the scriptures, may fall into great mistakes; the general causes of error should be well considered, and carefully avoided. These we shall find to be, prejudice, or pride, or hastiness of determining, or a neglect and unconcern for religion, or all sin in general.

Prejudice is a judgment which the mind passes upon a subject before it has received due information, or whilst it is partially inclined to one side of the question. That in all our enquiries we should divest ourselves of prejudice is commonly acknowledged. But who is entirely free from prejudice? Very few. There are many differences of opinion among Christians; and in these differences there must be error on one side or the other, as when casting up a sum by different persons, different numbers are produced. But certainly favorable allowances are to be made for the prejudices of good persons, for such prejudices from the prevailing force of education, from a modest distrust of their own understanding, from the example and authority of those of whose abilities and integrity they have a high opinion. Mistakes arising from such causes are often almost irresistable, and so far pardonable. But such prejudices as arise from vice, are entirely different and inexcusable.

Pride is certainly another cause of error. It leads to singularity, and singularity seldom leads to truth in points of morality. Pride makes us love

the praise of men more than the praise of God, and see things, not as they really are, but as our turbulent, our ambitious views and our worldly interests represent them. Pride makes men infallible in their own opinion, and therefore liable to more and worse mistakes than humble and diffident persons. Hastiness of determining is another cause by which we stray from truth, a cause arising from the small esteem which some entertain of religion.

When they condescend to make any enquiries about it, they do it in a careless impatient manner, and are led away by every deceitful argument that lays hold of them in reading or in conversation. They find difficulties in revelation which they cannot fully clear up, and thence they make a weak conclusion, that it is false. And this probably will terminate in atheism, because natural religion also hath its difficulties and obscurities. It had been well for several persons, if they had shunned the reading of irreligious books, and the conversation of profane companions. By impious doubts and scoffs, dressed up in a plausible manner, and seasoned with vivacity and impudence, many have received an incurable wound, departed from the right way, and never found it more.

Vice is another cause of error. It would be uncharitable and cruel to suppose that every mistake in religion proceeds from the will, and is a proof of wicked mind. And yet it is a sad and undoubted

truth, that vice is constantly accompanied with error, and that there never was an habitual sinner who had not something wrong in his notions of religion. How in the nature of things should it be otherwise? Vice inflames the passions, disturbs the understanding, sinks and debases the mind, fixes it upon low and mean objects, and takes from it the love of truth and right.

From these causes of error we should free ourselves, and enquire into our duty with a love of truth, a mind humble and desirous of receiving instruction, cautious not to be deceived by itself, or by others, with prayers to God to direct us, and a sincere resolution to serve him, and to perform all that he requires from us.—If we proceed thus, we may be certain of success; for nothing is more evident than that a person carefully endeavouring to inform himself of his duty, and using the means which God has afforded him, and doing nothing that his conscience condemns, shall find out all that is necessary for him to know. To this also the scriptures agree, containing great and clear promises to those who purify their minds from evil affections, and seriously apply themselves to the study of divine truths; whence this favorable conclusion may be drawn, that if any person be good, he shall be wise, wise so far as concerns his salvation, and secured from every thing that tends to perdition.

MODERATION.

BLAIR.

THE active mind of man seldom or never rests satisfied with its present condition, how prosperous soever. Originally formed for a wider range of objects, for a higher sphere of enjoyments, it finds itself in every situation of fortune, straightened and confined. Sensible of deficiency in its state, it is ever sending forth the fond desire, the aspiring wish, after something beyond what is enjoyed at present. Hence that restlessness which prevails so generally among mankind. Hence that disgust of pleasures which they have tried; that passion for novelty, that ambition of rising to some degree of eminence or felicity, of which they have formed to themselves an indistinct idea. All which may be considered as indications of a certain native, original greatness in the human soul, swelling beyond the limits of its present condition, and pointing at the higher objects for which it was made. Happy if those latent remains of our primitive state served to direct our wishes towards their proper destination, and to lead us into the path of true bliss.

Assuredly there is nothing unlawful in our wishing to be freed from whatever is disagreeable, and to obtain a fuller enjoyment of the comforts of life.

But when these wishes are not tempered by reason, they are in danger of precipitating us into much extravagance and folly. If we suffer our fancy to create to itself worlds of ideal happiness; if we feed our imagination with plans of opulence and splendour far beyond our rank; if we fix to our wishes certain stages of high advancement or certain degrees of uncommon reputation or distinction, as the sole stations of felicity, the assured consequence will be, that we shall become unhappy in our present state; unfit for acting the part, and discharging the duties belonging to it. Here then let moderation begins its reign; by bringing within reasonable bounds the wishes that we form. As soon as they become extravagant, let us check them by proper reflections on the fallacious nature of those objects which the world hangs out to allure desire.—Do you, my friends, imagine, that all are happy, who have attained to those summits of distinction, towards which you aspire? Alas! how frequently has experience shown, that where roses were supposed to bloom, nothing but briars and thorns grew! Reputation, beauty, riches, grandeur, nay, royalty itself, would many a time, have been gladly exchanged by the possessors, for that more quiet and humble station, with which you are now dissatisfied. With all that is splendid and shining in the world, it is decreed that there should mix many deep shades of woe. On the elevated situations of fortune, the great calamities of life chiefly fall. There, the storm spends its violence, and

there the thunder breaks; while safe and unhurt the inhabitant of the vale, remains below. Retreat, then, from those vain and pernicious excursions of extravagant desire. Satisfy yourselves with what is rational and attainable. Train your minds to moderate views of human life and human happiness.

By want of moderation in our hopes we not only increase dejection, when disappointment comes, but we accelerate disappointment; we bring forward, with greater speed, disagreeable changes in our state. For the natural consequence of presumptuous expectation, is rashness in conduct.—The arrogant mind, and the proud hope, are equally contrary to religion and to prudence. The world cannot bear such a spirit; and providence seldom fails to check it. The Almighty beholds with displeasure those who, intoxicated with prosperity, forget their dependence on that supreme power which raised them up. A temperate spirit, and moderate expectations, are the best safeguard of the mind in this uncertain and changing state. They enable us to pass through life with most comfort. When we rise in the world, they contribute to our elevation; and if we must fall, they render our fall the lighter.

The exercise of moderation is peculiarly requisite with regard to our passions; because there is no passion in human nature but what has, of itself

a tendency to run into excess. For all passion implies a violent emotion of the mind. During the time when it grows and swells, it constantly justifies to our apprehension the tumult which it creates, by means of a thousand false arguments which it forms, and brings to its aid. Of some passions, such as anger and resentment, the excess is so obviously dangerous, as loudly to call for moderation. He who gives himself up to the impetuosity of such passions, without restraint, is universally condemned by the world; and hardly accounted a man of sound mind.

We ought always to have at hand considerations, which may assist us in tempering the warmth of anger, and in regaining possession of our souls. Let us be persuaded, that moments of passion are always moments of delusion, that nothing truly is, what it then seems to be. On no occasion let us imagine that strength of mind is shewn by violence of passion. This is not the strength of men, but the impetuosity of children. True strength of mind is shown, in governing and resisting passion; not in giving it scope; in acting on the most trying occasions, according to the dictates of conscience, and temperate reason.

Enlarged views of the future destination of man, and of the place which he may hope to possess in an eternal world, naturally give birth to moderation of mind. They tend to cool all misplaced ardour

about the advantages of this state; and to produce that calm and temperate frame of spirit, which becomes men, and Christians. They give no ground for entire disregard of earthly concerns. While we are men, we must feel and act as such. But they afford a good reason why they who believe, *the Lord to be at hand*, should let their *moderation* appear and be *known unto all men*.

ON CANDOUR.

BLAIR.

THAT candour which is a Christian virtue, consists not in fairness of speech, but in fairness of heart. It may want the blandishment of external courtesy, but supplies its place with humane and generous liberality of sentiment. Its manners are unaffected, and its professions cordial. There is a proper mean between undistinguished credulity and universal jealousy, which a sound understanding discerns, and which the man of candour studies to preserve. He makes allowance for the mixture of evil and good, which is to be found in every human character. He expects none to be faultless; and he is unwilling to believe that there is any without some commendable quality. In the midst of many defects, he can discover a virtue. Under the influence of personal resentment, he can be just to the merits of an enemy. He never lends an open ear to

those defamatory reports, and dark suggestions, which among the tribes of the censorious, circulate with so much rapidity, and meet with such ready acceptance. He is not hasty to judge, and he requires full evidence before he will condemn. As long as an action can be ascribed to different motives, he holds it as no mark of sagacity to impute it always to the worst. Where there is just ground for doubt, he keeps his judgment undecided; and during the period of suspense, leans to the most charitable construction which an action can bear. When he must condemn, he condemns with regret; and without those aggravations which the severity of others add to the crime. He listens calmly to the apology of the offender, and readily admits every extenuating circumstance which equity can suggest. How much soever he may blame the principles of any sect or party, he never confounds under one general censure, all who belong to that party or sect. He charges them not with such consequences of their tenets, as they refuse and disavow. From one wrong opinion, he does not infer the subversion of all sound principles; nor, from one bad action, conclude that all regard to conscience is overthrown. When he *beholds the mote in his brother's eye*, he remembers *the beam in his own*. He commisserates human frailty; and judges of others, according to the principles by which he would think it reasonable that they should judge of him. In a word, he views men and actions in the clear sunshine of cha-

rity and good nature; and not in that dark and sullen shade, which jealousy and party spirit throw over all characters.

Whatever is amiable in manners, or useful in society, naturally and easily ingrafts itself upon a candid temper. Gentleness, humanity, and compassion, flow from it as their native spring. Open and cheerful in itself, it diffuses cheerfulness and good humour over all who are under its influence. It is the chief ground of mutual confidence and union among men. It prevents those animosities from arising, which are the offspring of groundless prejudice; or by its benign interposition, allays them when arisen. In the magistrate, it tempers justice with lenity. Among subjects, it promotes good order and submission. It connects humanity with piety. For he who is not given to think evil of his fellow creatures, will not be ready to censure the dispensations of his Creator. Whereas the same turn of mind which renders one jealous and unjust towards men, will incline him to be querulous and impious towards God.

Any man who attends to what passes within himself, may easily discern, what a complicated system the human character is, and what a variety of circumstances must be taken into the account in order to estimate it truly. No single instance of conduct whatever, is sufficient to determine it. As from

one worthy action, it were credulity not charity, to conclude a person to be free from all vice; so from one which is censurable, it is perfectly unjust to infer that the author of it is without conscience, and without merit. Did you know all the attending circumstances it might appear in an excusable light; nay, perhaps, under a commendable form. No error is more palpable than to look for uniformity from human nature. Mankind are consistent neither in good nor in evil. In the present state of frailty, all is mixed and blended. The purest human virtue is consistent with some vice; and in the midst of much vice and disorder, amiable, nay, respectable qualities may be found. There are few cases, in which we have ground to conclude that all goodness is lost. There may lie in the character, some sparks of piety and virtue, suppressed, but not extinguished; which kept alive by the breath of heaven, and gathering strength in secret, from reflection, may, on the first favorable opening which is afforded them, be ready to break forth with splendour and force. Placed then, in a situation of so much uncertainty and darkness, where our knowledge of the hearts and characters of men, is so limited, and our judgments concerning them, are so apt to err, what a continual call do we receive either to suspend our judgment, or to give it on the favorable side? Especially when we consider, that as, through imperfect information we are unqualified for deciding soundly, so, through want of impartiality, we are often tempted to decide wrong.

It often happens, that the attachment which we contract to the country, or the church to which we belong, or to some political denomination under which we class ourselves, both confines our affections within too narrow a sphere, and gives rise to violent prejudices against such as come under an opposite description. Not contented with being in the right ourselves, we must find all others in the wrong. We claim an exclusive possession of goodness and wisdom; and from approving warmly of of those who join us, we proceed to condemn, with much acrimony, not only the principles, but the characters of those from whom we differ. It is in religious dissensions chiefly, that the mischievous power of uncharitable prejudice has displayed its full atrocity. Religion is always found to heighten every passion on which it acts, and to render every contest into which it enters, uncommonly ardent; because the objects which it presents are of such a nature, as strongly to seize and engage the human mind. When zeal for their own principles has prompted men to view those of a different persuasion in the odious light which bigotry suggests, every sentiment of humanity has too often been extinguished. The mild influence of that religion, which breathes nothing but gentleness, has proved too feeble to restrain the violent and bloody hand of persecution; and the uncharitable spirit, raging among contending parties, has filled the world with such calamities and crimes as have brought disgrace on the christian name.

It clearly appears that no part of the government of temper deserves attention more, than to keep our minds pure from uncharitable prejudices, and open to candour and humanity in judging of others. The worst consequences both to ourselves and to society, follow from the opposite spirit. Let us beware of encouraging a habit of suspicion, by forming too severe and harsh opinions concerning human nature in general. A great proportion of infirmity and corruption, doubtless adheres to it; yet tempered also it is, with various mixtures of virtue and good affection. Much piety and goodness may be hidden in hearts that are unknown to us. Vice is glaring and loud. The crimes of the wicked make a noise in the world, and alarm society. True worth is retired and modest, and requires particular situations to bring it forth to public notice.

To youth it particularly belongs to be generous in sentiment, candid in opinion, undesigning in behaviour, open to the most favorable construction of actions and conduct. Throughout all the stages of life, candour is one of the most honorable distinctions of the human character; it is connected with magnanimity; it is justified by wisdom; it is suitable to the relation in which we stand to one another. But if reason and humanity be insufficient to restrain us from rash and uncharitable judgments, let that awful denunciation frequently resound in our ears,— *He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy.*

ON THE MIXTURE OF THE GOOD AND BAD IN SOCIETY.

BLAIR.

WHEN we look around us, nothing is more conspicuous in the state of the world, than that broad mixture of the religious and the impious, the virtuous and the wicked, which we find taking place in every society. Strong objections seem hence to arise against either the wisdom or goodness of divine providence; especially when we behold bad men not only tolerated in the world, but occasionally exalted in their circumstances, to the depression of the just.—It is a principle in which all serious and reflecting minds have agreed, and which by many arguments is confirmed, that our present state on earth is designed to be a state of discipline and improvement, in order to fit human nature for a higher and better state which it is to attain hereafter. Now, this principle being once admitted, we say, that the mixture of virtue and vice which here prevails, is calculated to answer this purpose better than a more unmixed and perfect state of society would have done. For the crimes of the wicked give occasion to the exercise of many excellent dispositions of heart among the righteous. They bring forth all the suffering virtues, which otherwise would have had no field; and by the exercise of which, the

human character is tried, and requires some of its chief honors. Were there no bad men in the world to vex and distress the good, the good might appear in the light of harmless innocence; but could have no opportunity of displaying fidelity, magnanimity, patience, and fortitude. One half of virtue, and not the least important half, would be lost to the world. In our present imperfect state, any virtue which is never exercised is in hazard of becoming extinct in the human breast. If goodness constantly proceeded in a smooth and flowery path; if, meeting with no adversary to oppose it, it were surrounded with acclamation and praise, is there no ground to dread that it might be corrupted by vanity, or might sink into indolence? This dangerous calm must therefore be interrupted. The waters must be troubled, lest they should stagnate and putrefy. When you behold wicked men multiplying in number, and increasing in power, imagine not that providence particularly favors them. No; they are suffered for a time to prosper, that they may fulfil the high designs of heaven. They are employed as instruments in the hand of God for the improvement of his servants. They are the rods with which he chastens the virtuous, in order to rouse them from a dangerous slumber; to form them for the day of of adversity, and to teach them how to suffer honorably.

The mixture of the bad among the good, serves not only to give exercise to the passive graces, but

also to improve the active powers and virtues of man. It enures the righteous to vigilance and exertion. It obliges them to stand forth, and act their part with firmness and constancy in evil times. It gives occasion for their virtues to shine with conspicuous lustre; and makes them appear as the lights of the world amidst surrounding darkness. Were it not for the dangers that arise from abounding iniquity, there would be no opportunity for courage to act, for wisdom to admonish, for caution to watch, nor for faith to exert itself in *overcoming the world.* It is that mixture of dispositions which now takes place, that renders the theatre on which we act so busy and stirring, and so much fitted for giving employment to every part of man's intelligent and moral nature. It affords a complete field for the genuine display of characters; and gives every man the opportunity to come forth, and show what he is. Were the tenor of human conduct altogether regular and uniform, interrupted by no follies and vices, no cross dispositions and irregular passions, many of our active powers would find no exercise. Perhaps even our life would languish, and become too still and insipid. Man is not yet ripe for a paradise of innocence, and for the enjoyment of a perfect and faultless society. As in the natural world, he is not made for perpetual spring, and cloudless skies, but by the wintry storm must be called to exert his abilities for procuring shelter and defence; so in the moral world, the intermixture of bad men, renders many an exertion necessary, which in a

more perfect state of the world, would find no place, but which in the present state of trial, is proper and useful.

The wisdom of providence in this dispensation, will be farther illustrated by considering the useful instructions which we receive, or which at least every wise man may receive, from the follies and vices of those among whom we are now obliged to live. They furnish instruction concerning the snares and dangers against which we ought to be most on our guard. They put it thereby in our power to profit by the errors and misconduct of others. By observing from what small beginnings the greatest crimes have arisen; observing how bad company has seduced this man from his original principles and habits; how a careless indulgence of pleasure has blinded and intoxicated that man; how the neglect of divine institutions has, in another, gradually paved the way for open profligacy; much salutary instruction is conveyed to the virtuous. Tracing the dangerous and slippery paths, by which so many have been insensibly betrayed into ruin, their views of human nature are enlarged; the sense of their own imbecility is strongly impressed upon them; accompanied with the conviction of the necessity of a constant dependence on the grace and assistance of heaven. All the crimes, which they behold disturbing society around them, serve as signals hung out to them, beacons planted in their view, to prevent their making shipwreck

among those rocks on which others have split. It has been justly said, that not only from the advices of his friends, but from the reproaches of his enemies, a wise man may draw instruction. In the same manner, it is not only by the examples of good men, but likewise by those of the wicked, that an attentive mind may be confirmed in virtue.

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION UPON PROSPERITY.

BLAIR.

PIETY and gratitude to God contribute in a high degree to enliven prosperity. Gratitude is a pleasing emotion. The sense of being distinguished by the kindness of another, gladdens the heart, warms it with reciprocal affection, and gives to any possession, which is agreeable in itself, a double relish, from its being the gift of a friend. Favors conferred by men, I acknowledge may prove burdensome. For human virtue is never perfect; and sometimes unreasonable expectations on the one side, sometimes a mortifying sense of dependence on the other, corrode in secret the pleasure of benefits, and convert the obligations of friendship into grounds of jealousy. But nothing of this kind can affect the intercourse of gratitude with heaven. Its favors are wholly disinterested; and with a gratitude

the most cordial and unsuspicious, a good man looks up to that Almighty Benefactor, who aims at no end but the happiness of those whom he blesses, and who desires no return from them but a devout and thankful heart.

Religion affords to good men peculiar security in the enjoyment of their prosperity. One of the first reflections which must strike every thinking man, after his situation in the world has become agreeable, is, that the continuance of such a situation is most uncertain. From a variety of causes, he lies open to change. On many sides he sees that he may be pierced; and the wider his comforts extend, the broader is the mark which he spreads to the arrows of misfortune. Hence many a secret alarm to the reflecting mind; and to those who reject all alarms, the real danger increases, in proportion to their improvident security. By worldly assistance it is in vain to think of providing any effectual defence, seeing the world's mutability is the very cause of our terror. It is from a higher principle, from a power superior to the world, that relief must be sought amidst such disquietudes of the heart. He who in his prosperity can look up to one who is witness to his moderation, humanity, and charity; he who can appeal to heaven, that he has not been elated by pride, nor overcome by pleasure, but has studied to employ its gifts to the honor of the giver; this man, if there be any truth in religion, if there be any benignity or goodness in the administration

of the universe, has just cause for encouragement and hope. Not that an interest in the divine grace, will perpetuate to a good man, more than to others, a life of unruffled prosperity. Change and alteration form the very essence of the world. But let the world change around him at pleasure, he has ground to hope, that it shall not be able to make him unhappy. Whatever may vary, God's providence is still the same; and his love to the righteous remains unaltered. If it shall be the divine will, to remove one comfort, he trusts that some other shall be given. Whatever is given, whatever is taken away, he confides that in the last result, all *shall work for his good.*

Hence he is not disturbed, like bad men, by the instability of the world. Dangers which overcome others, shake not his more steady mind. He enjoys the pleasures of life pure and unalloyed, because he enjoys them, as long as they last, without anxious terrors. They are not his all, his only good. He welcomes them when they arrive; and when they pass away, he can view them depart without agony or despair. He is like a tree, whose branches the tempest may indeed bend, but whose roots it cannot touch; a tree which may occasionally be stripped of its leaves, and blossoms, and in due season flourishes a new. Religion forms good men to the most proper temper for the enjoyment of prosperity. A little reflection may satisfy us, that mere possession even granting it to be secure, does not constitute

enjoyment. Give a man all that is in the power of the world to bestow; surround him with riches, crown him with honors, invest him, if you will, with absolute dominion; but leave him at the same time under some secret oppression or heaviness of heart; you bestow indeed the materials of enjoyment, but you deprive him of ability to extract it. You set a feast before him, but he wants the power of tasting it. Hence prosperity is so often an equivocal word, denoting merely affluence of possession, but unjustly applied to the miserable possessor. We all know the effects which any indisposition of the body, even though slight, produces on external prosperity. Visit the gayest and most fortunate man on earth, only with sleepless nights; disorder any single organ of the senses; corrode but one of his smallest nerves; and you shall presently see all his gaity vanish; and you shall hear him complain, that he is a miserable creature, and express his envy of the peasant and the cottager. And can you believe that a disease of the soul is less fatal to enjoyment than a disease of the animal frame; or that a sound mind is not as essential as a sound body to the prosperity of man? Let us rate sensual gratifications as high as we please, we shall be made to feel that the seat of enjoyment is in the soul. The corrupted temper, and the guilty passions of the bad, frustrate the effect of every advantage which the world confers on them. The world may call them men of pleasure; but of all men they are the greatest foes to pleasure. From their eagerness to grasp, they

strangle and destroy it. None but the temperate, the regular and the virtuous, know how to enjoy prosperity. They bring to its comforts the manly relish of a sound uncorrupted mind. They stop at the proper point, before enjoyment degenerates into disgust, and pleasure is converted into pain. They are strangers to those complaints which flow from spleen, caprice, and all the fantastical distresses of a vitiated mind.

Whenever guilt mingles with prosperity, a certain gloom and heaviness enter along with it. Vicious intrigues never fail to entangle and embarrass those who engage in them. But innocence confers ease and freedom on the mind; leaves it open to every pleasing sensation, gives a brightness to the spirits, similar to the native gaiety of youth and health; ill imitated, and ill supplied, by that forced levity of the vicious, which arises not from the health, but from the disease of the mind. Feeble are all pleasures, in which the heart has no part. The selfish gratifications of the bad, are both narrow in their circle, and short in their duration. But prosperity is redoubled to a good man, by his generous use of it. It is reflected back upon him, from every one whom he makes happy. In the intercourse of domestic affection, in the attachment of friends, the gratitude of dependants, the esteem and good will of all who know him, he sees blessings multiplied round him, on every side.—Religion and a good conscience are essential ingredients in

the prosperity of life. Separated from them, prosperity, how fair soever it may seem to the world, is insipid, nay, frequently noxious to the possessor. United with them it rises into a real blessing bestowed by God upon man.

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON ADVERSITY.

BLAIR.

To a thoughtful mind, no study can appear more important, than how to be suitably prepared for the misfortunes of life; so as to contemplate them in prospect without dismay, and, if they must befall, to bear them without dejection. Throughout every age, the wisdom of the wise, the treasures of the rich, and the power of the mighty, have been employed, either in guarding their state against the approach of distress, or in rendering themselves less vulnerable by its attacks. Power has endeavoured to remove adversity to a distance; philosophy has studied, when it drew nigh, to conquer it by patience; and wealth has sought out every pleasure that can compensate or alleviate pain.—It is religion only that can prepare the mind for encountering, with fortitude, the most severe shocks of adversity; whereas vice, by its natural influence on the temper, tends to produce dejection under the slightest trials. All the principles which religion teaches, and all the habits

which it forms, are favorable to strength of mind. It will be found that whatever purifies, fortifies also the heart. In the course of living righteously, soberly, and godly, a good man acquires a steady, and well governed spirit. Trained by divine grace, to enjoy with moderation the advantages of the world, neither lifted up by success, nor elevated with sensuality, he meets the changes in his lot without unmanly dejection. He is enured to temperance and restraint. He has learned firmness and self-command. He is accustomed to look up to that Supreme Providence, which disposes of human affairs, not with reverence only, but with trust and hope.

The time of prosperity was to him, not merely a season of barren joy, but productive of much and useful improvement. He had cultivated his mind. He had stored it with useful knowledge, with good principles, and virtuous dispositions. These resources remain entire, when the days of trouble come. They remain with him in sickness, as in health; in poverty, as in the midst of riches; in his dark and solitary hours, no less than when surrounded with friends, and gay society. From the glare of prosperity, he can without dejection, withdraw into the shade. Excluded from several advantages of the world, he may be obliged to retreat into a narrower circle, but within that circle, he will find many comforts left. His chief pleasures were always of the calm, innocent, and temperate kind;

and over these, the changes of the world have the least power. His mind is a kingdom to him, and he can still enjoy it. The world did not bestow upon him all his enjoyments; and therefore it is not in the power of the world, by its most cruel attacks, to carry them all away.

Look abroad into life, and you will find the general sense of mankind bearing witness to this important truth, that mind is superior to fortune; that what one feels within, is of much greater importance, than all that befalls him without. Let a man be brought into some such severe and trying situation, as fixes the attention of the public on his behaviour. The first question which we put concerning him, is not, what does he suffer? but, how does he bear it? has he a quiet mind? or, does he appear to be unhappy within? If we judge him to be composed and firm, resigned to providence, and supported by conscious integrity, his character rises, and his misery lessens in our view. We esteem and admire, rather than pity him.—Recollect what holy men have endured, for the sake of conscience, and with what cheerfulness they have suffered!

Never then imagine, that misfortunes alone form the misery of man. None but the guilty are completely miserable. The misgiving and distrust, the accusations and reproaches of their minds, the sense of having drawn down upon their heads, the evils which they suffer, and the terrifying expecta-

tion of more and worse evils to come; these are the essential ingredients of human misery. They not only whet the edge, but they envenom the darts of affliction, and add poison to the wound. Whereas, when misfortunes assail a good man, they carry no such fatal auxiliaries in their train; they may ruffle the surface of his soul; but there is a strength within, which resists their farther impression. The constitution of his mind, is sound. The world can inflict upon it no wounds, but what admit of cure.

But of all the thoughts, which can enter into the mind, in the season of distress, the belief of an interest in his favor who rules the world, is the most soothing. Every form of religion has afforded to virtuous men, some degree of this consolation. But it was reserved for the Christian Revelation, to carry it to its highest point. It is a system of complete relief, extended from our spiritual, to our temporal distresses. The same hand which holds out forgiveness to the penitent, and resistance to the frail, dispenses comfort and hope to the afflicted.

It deserves your particular notice, in this view, that there is no character which God more frequently assumes to himself, in the sacred writings, than that of the Patron of the distressed. Compassion is that attribute of his nature, which he has chosen to place in the greatest variety of lights, on purpose that he might accommodate his majesty to our weakness, and provide a cordial for our human

griefs.—He is the hearer of all prayers; but with particular attention he is represented as listening to the cry of the poor, and regarding the prayer of the destitute.

Such views of the Supreme Being impart the most sensible consolation to every pious heart. They present his administration under an aspect so mild and benign, as in a great measure to disperse the gloom which hangs over human life. A good man acts with a vigor, and suffers with a patience more than human, when he believes himself countenanced by the Almighty. Injured or oppressed by the world, he looks up to a judge who will vindicate his cause; he appeals to a witness who knows his integrity; he commits himself to a friend, who will never forsake him. When tired with the vexations of life, devotion opens to him its quiet retreat, where the tumults of the world are hushed and its cares are lost, in happy oblivion. There he regains serenity, the agitation of passion is calmed; and a softening balm is infused into the wounds of the mind. Disclosing to an invisible friend those secret griefs which he has no encouragement to make known to the world, his heart is lightened. He does not feel himself solitary or forsaken. He beholds the hand of providence conducting all the hidden springs and movements of the universe; and with a secret, but unerring operation, directing every event towards the happiness of mankind.

RESIGNATION.

JORTIN.

To suffer in some degree, is as unavoidable as it is to breathe and to think. Through such trials we must all expect to pass; we cannot, and our Saviour himself did not escape them. That man is born to trouble, is a law which he came not to destroy, but to fulfil; and as he became a man, he became a man also of sorrows. But though he did not free us from the calamities and inconveniences of life, yet, he enables us to bear them by the religion that he has taught us. Nature says,—man is born to trouble. Revelation says,—a good man is born to happiness. Nature says,—man is born to die. Revelation says—a good man dies to rise again, unto life eternal. We must set the one against the other, and be thankful that since, as we are men, labour and sorrow is our patrimony; as we are Christians, glory and immortality may be our inheritance.

One great motive to resignation, and which comprehends nearly all the rest,—is the goodness of God. Upon this all our hope and comfort is founded. A belief of this, will make us submit to any thing that God shall impose upon us; it will

reconcile us to inconveniences, even for this reason, because it is *his* pleasure.—Another motive to resignation is, that calamities, if we make a right use of them, may be very profitable to us, and that they plainly conduce to this excellent end. They remind us to enter into ourselves, and to examine the past faults of our lives; they lead us to repentance, they wean us from too great a fondness for a world which we must soon leave, and set our affections on proper objects, they keep us out of the reach of many temptations to which a state of affluence and prosperity lies continually exposed; and they soften our hearts, and teach us humanity and compassion towards those who are in affliction.

The future reward of heaven, is another inducement to resignation. If indeed it were evident that this state was our all, these few days our only portion, men, at least the unhappier part of men, could scarcely account themselves the offspring of a good and merciful Author, but children of sorrow, forced into being they know not how or why, and exposed to all the injuries that unrelenting nature could lay upon them. A future state removes all pleas for discontent; and when eternal happiness is promised to sincere endeavours, we may well submit with decent patience to afflictions of a short continuance, and to imperfections which we shall soon cast off, and in all circumstances pay to divine providence the reasonable duty of believing, that it orders all for the best.

Another motive to resignation, is the behaviour of our Lord,—which we, who assume the honorable name of Christians—should be ambitious to imitate. Would we learn to act as we ought under the evils that may probably some time or other overtake us? We need no other book than the New Testament, and no other example than our Saviour's to instruct us. His sufferings and conduct under them is one of the most agreeable and most useful meditations that can occupy our minds, especially if we ourselves are in any of the same difficult circumstances. To reflect upon the majestic and resplendent parts of his life and character, affords not the same relief to a dejected mind. To view him commanding all nature, saying to the sea and to the winds, "peace, be still;" and to the dead, "come forth;" to view him striking to the ground those who came to take him, by only saying, "I am he;" and rising triumphant from the grave, and ascending in the clouds to heaven; to view him thus, will excite our reverence, and confirm our belief in him; but there is nothing in this, that we can imitate and apply to ourselves. It is more pleasing to view him, where he appears as one of us, as much distressed and as little regarded as we ourselves can be; to consider him possessing nothing, and attended with a few friends almost as poor as himself; enduring hunger, thirst, cold, and weariness, slandered and reviled, despised and betrayed, scourged and crucified; to consider him bearing affliction, not with stoical scorn and unconcern, as though he neither felt pain,

nor was sensible of injuries, but deeply affected with fear and horror, with sorrow and despondency; bending to earth under the heavy hand of God, offering up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, and almost asking what, as he well knew, was not be obtained; to see him thus encompassed about, as with afflictions, so also with human infirmities; to see him in all these trials persisting in an uniform obedience to God, exercising the utmost charity and long-suffering towards men, towards his enemies and persecutors; encountering evils most disagreeable to human nature, with patience and silent meekness, without repining and without murmuring.

In these things he is to us an example which, by the assistance of God, we may hope, though not to equal, yet in some degree to resemble. The Apostles recommend it to us, supposing that we may come somewhat near it. They exhort us in general to live as he lived, in particular to imitate the humility, patience, and resignation, which he shewed when he suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.—If we carefully meditate on the life of Christ, and study to conform our own to it, and apply for aid to him who is always found of those who seek him, peace of mind, and that silent and sedate pleasure which ariseth from obedience, will follow us through all situations, making the best far more agreeable than it would

else be, and administering a relief under the worst, which will render it supportable.

I am sensible that to talk to gay and inconsiderate persons of any degree of pleasure joined to adversity, is in their opinion to talk in an enthusiastic strain; but there are pleasures of the serious and even of the melancholy kind. The joy of the first believers under ill usage and heavy trials is mentioned in the New Testament; and St. Paul thought it no contradiction to say of himself and of other servants of Christ, that they were sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Our Saviour, without question, though in a most eminent manner a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, yet often enjoyed a sober and exalted pleasure, which no man besides himself ever felt, as he was the most holy and beneficent of all men, and the only one in whom no sin was found. To rejoice in prosperity, nature, will teach us; to rejoice in the hope of immortality, our Lord, will enable us, if we consent to be guided by him; and of this joy adversity itself will not deprive us.

ON THE SABBATH.

JORTIN.

It has been a matter of dispute, how far the law of the sabbath concerns Christians. This law con-

tained in the fourth commandment, is of a mixed nature, partly ritual, and partly moral. The moral part is, that every one ought to set aside a portion of their time to perform acts of piety and devotion, as prayer, thanksgiving, and the like, and to meet together for that purpose. The ritual part is, that every seventh day shall be that portion of time, and that a strict rest shall be observed on that day.—That part therefore which is moral, namely, a solemn worship of God at stated times, is an everlasting law. This will appear if we examine the ends for which the sabbath was instituted.

It was instituted in general for the preservation and promotion of religion; and some such law, divine or human, is necessary for that end. For we cannot perform a reasonable service to God, without some knowledge of his nature, and of his will; nor is this knowledge to be acquired without instruction, and serious meditation, nor to be kept up, without stated times for public worship. It was instituted to preserve men from idolatory, irreligion, scepticism, and atheism. That they might not worship the host of heaven, or a multitude of Gods, or that they might not imagine that the world was without beginning and of itself, or made by chance or necessity, the sabbath was given as a memorial of the creation, and a day for the worship of one God, maker of heaven and earth; and on this account likewise it is of perpetual use.

It appears from some passages in the New Testament, and from other eminent writings, that the disciples and their converts, agreed to set a part for public worship the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection, which was also the day on which he sent down the Holy Ghost upon his apostles. By setting aside the Lord's day for the solemn worship of God, they observed all that was moral in the fourth commandment, namely, a stated time for religious exercises; and they thought it proper to retain the same portion of time one day in seven. And we are taught by St. Paul, that all ritual ceremonial laws, given to the Jews by positive appointment, were of no longer force after the promulgation of the gospel.

Since then the Jewish sabbath is abolished with the ritual law, and since in its stead the Lord's day was observed by the ancient Christians, we may observe that by keeping holy the Lord's day, we pay a due obedience to the moral and spiritual part of the fourth commandment. How we ought to observe this day, we may best learn from the ancient Jews, and from the first Christians.

The Jews, besides the temple of Jerusalem had many synagogues, where they constantly assembled on the sabbath days, to worship God, and where they heard the law and the prophets read and explained. The Christians, as Justin Martyr an

ancient writer assures us, met together every Sunday, at which time portions of scripture, says he, from the Old and New Testament were read, and discourses were made, to exhort them to piety; then they joined in prayer, then they partook of the holy communion; and lastly, they made collections for the poor. The first Christians were so persuaded that this was an indisputable duty, that they observed it, not only in peaceable times, when they were permitted to make open profession of their faith, but in times of persecution, and at the hazard of their lives. The cruelty of princes and magistrates could not make them neglect it; for we find by their writings, that they used to come together before break of day, and in small companies, and in different places, when they could not meet openly and in great numbers.

There was a time, when most of the serious persons in this nation, entertained notions concerning the Lord's day rather too rigorous and precise, and leaning too much to a Judaical and ceremonial strictness. But many are now disposed to the other and the worse extreme, of neglecting that day, of spending the whole or a greater part of it in worldly affairs, or of distinguishing it from other days only so far as to make it a day of idleness or of diversion.

If God sent his Son to give us laws, by which we should regulate our conduct, and by which we

should be judged, we ought not to omit any opportunities of frequenting those assemblies, where the divine precepts are taught by those who are appointed to that office, that so we may be instructed in those things on which our eternal happiness depends. This argument will reach the greater part of Christians, who stand in need of such instruction, that they may acquire right notions of morality and of christianity, and a due sense of their importance.

We require to be excited to the discharge of those duties, which we know better than we practise, and to be continually exhorted. Upon this account religious assemblies are absolutely necessary, where are set before us the obligations to live righteously, and the advantages of such a life, the pernicious nature and fatal consequences of sin, truths which the wisest and best person in the world want frequently to hear, plain and obvious as they are, and truths, which every person ought to hear with attention and respect, how imperfect soever be our discourses upon them. Such is the dignity of the subject, that we must sink beneath it; but such is its usefulness and importance, that it is scarcely possible to treat it seriously without saying something, that must have a good effect upon a well disposed mind.

ON GENTLENESS.

BLAIR.

TRUE gentleness is to be distinguished from passive tameness of spirit, and from unlimited compliance with the manners of others. That passive tameness, which submits without a struggle to every encroachment of the violent and assuming, forms no part of Christian duty; but on the contrary is destructive of general happiness and order. That unlimited compliance, which, on every occasion falls in with the opinions and manners of others, is so far from being a virtue, that it is itself a vice, and the parent of many vices. It overthrows all steadiness of principle; and produces that sinful conformity with the world, which taints the whole character. In the present corrupted state of human manners, always to assent and to comply is the very worst maxim we can adopt. It is impossible to support the purity and dignity of Christian morals, without opposing the world on various occasions, even though we should stand alone. That gentleness therefore, which belongs to virtue, is to be carefully distinguished from the mean spirit of cowards, and the fawning assent of sycophants. It renounces no just right from fear. It gives up no important truth from flattery. It is indeed not only

consistent with a firm mind, but it necessarily requires a manly spirit, and a fixed principle, in order to give it any real value. Upon this solid ground only the polish of gentleness can with advantage be superinduced.

It stands opposed not to the most determined regard for virtue and truth, but to harshness and severity, to pride and arrogance, to violence and oppression. It is properly, that part of the great virtue of charity, which makes us unwilling to give pain to any of our brethren. Compassion prompts us to relieve their wants. Forbearance prevents us from retaliating their injuries. Meekness restrains our angry passions, candour our severe judgments. Gentleness corrects whatever is offensive in our manners; and by a constant train of humane attentions, studies to alleviate the burden of common misery. Its office therefore is extensive. It is not like some other virtues, called forth on peculiar emergencies; but it is continually in action, when we are engaged in intercourse with men. It ought to form our address, to regulate our speech, and to diffuse itself over our whole behaviour.

True gentleness is founded on a sense of what we owe to him who made us, and to the common nature of which we all share. It arises from reflection on our own failings and wants; and from just views of the condition, and the duty of man. It is a native

feeling, heightened and improved by principle. It is the heart which easily relents; which feels for every thing that is human; and is backward and slow to inflict the least wound. It is affable in its address, and mild in its demeanor; ever ready to oblige, and willing to be obliged by others; breathing habitual kindness towards friends, courtesy to strangers, long suffering to enemies. It exercises authority with moderation, administers reproof with tenderness; confers favors with ease and modesty. It is unassuming in opinion, and temperate in zeal. It contends not eagerly about trifles; is slow to contradict, and still slower to blame; but prompt to allay dissension, and to restore peace. It neither intermeddles unnecessarily with the affairs, nor pries inquisitively into the secrets of others. It delights above all things to alleviate distress, and if it cannot dry up the falling tear, to soothe at least the grieving heart. Where it has not the power of being useful, it is never burdensome. It seeks to please, rather than to shine and dazzle; and conceals with care, that superiority, either of talents or of rank, which is oppressive to those who are beneath it.

In the Saviour of the world we have an example of this mild and gentle goodness. During all his intercourse with men, no harshness, or pride, or stately distance appeared in his demeanour. In his access he was easy; in his manners simple; in his answers mild; in his whole behaviour, humble and

obliging. You need only open the New Testament to find this virtue perpetually inculcated. Charity or love, is the capital figure ever presented to our view; and gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness, are the sounds ever recurring to our ear. Do we pretend respect and zeal for this religion, and at the same time allow ourselves in that harshness and severity, which are so contradictory to its genius? Too plainly we show, that it has no power over our hearts. We may retain the Christian name; but we have abandoned the Christian spirit.

Great events give scope for great virtues; but the main tenor of human life, is composed of small occurrences. Within the round of these, lie the materials of the happiness of most men; the subjects of their duty, and the trials of their virtue. Virtue must be formed and supported, not by unfrequent acts, but by daily and repeated exertions. In order to its becoming either vigorous or useful, it must be habitually active; not breaking forth occasionally with a transient lustre, like the light of day. Not like the aromatic gale, which sometimes feasts the sense; but like the ordinary breeze, which purifies the air, and renders it healthful.

Years may pass over our heads, without affording any opportunity for acts of high beneficence or extensive utility. Whereas not a day passes, but in the common transactions of life, and especially in

the intercourse of domestic society, gentleness finds place for promoting the happiness of others, and for strengthening in ourselves the habit of virtue. Nay, by seasonable discoveries of an humane spirit, we sometimes contribute more materially to the advancement of happiness, than by actions which are seemingly more important. There are situations, not a few, in human life, where the encouraging reception, the condescending behaviour, and the look of sympathy, bring greater relief to the heart, than the most bountiful gift. While on the other side, when the hand of liberality is extended to bestow, the want of gentleness is sufficient to frustrate the intention of the benefit. We sour those whom we mean to oblige; and by conferring favors with ostentation and harshness, we convert them into injuries. Can any disposition then be held to possess a low place in the scale of virtue, whose influence is so considerable on the happiness of the world? Gentleness is, in truth the great avenue to mutual enjoyments. Amidst the strife of interfering interests, it tempers the violence of contention, and keeps alive the seeds of harmony. It softens animosities; renews endearments; and renders the countenance of man a refreshment to man. Banish gentleness from the earth; suppose the world to be filled with none but harsh and contentious spirits; and what sort of society would remain? The solitude of the desert were preferable to it.

ON CONSCIENCE.

BLAIR.

THERE belongs to human nature a sense of moral good and evil, or a faculty which distinguishes right from wrong, in action and conduct. In the darkest regions of the earth, and among the rudest tribes of men, a distinction has ever been made between just and unjust, between duty and crime. Throughout all the intercourse of human beings, those distinctions are supposed. They are the foundation of the mutual trust which the transactions of life require; nay, the very entertainments of society constantly appeal to them. The historian, who studies to magnify his hero; by representing him as just and generous; the poet, who seeks to interest the world in his fictions, by engaging the heart in behalf of distressed virtue; are sufficient to confute the sceptic, who denies any natural perception of a distinction in actions.

But though a sense of moral good and evil be deeply impressed on the heart of man, yet it is not of sufficient power to regulate his life. In his present state, it is both too general to afford him full direction in conduct, and too feeble to withstand the opposition of contrary principles in his nature. It is often perverted by ignorance and superstition; it

is too easily overcome by passion and desire. Hence the importance of that divine revelation, which communicates both light and strength; which, by the instructive discoveries it makes, and by the powerful assistance it supplies, raises man to a station infinitely superior to that which he possesses under the mere light of nature.

It is of consequence, however, to remark, that this revelation necessarily supposes an antecedent sense of right and wrong to take place in the human mind. It addresses itself to men as possessed of such a faculty; and, when it commands them, in general terms, to pursue *whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, or of good report*, it plainly appeals to the native dictates of their hearts. Nay, unless men were endowed by nature with some sense of duty, or of moral obligation, they could reap no benefit from revelation; they would remain incapable of all religion whatever. For in vain were a system of duty prescribed to them by the word of God; allegiance were in vain required towards their Creator; or love and gratitude enjoined towards their Redeemer; if previously, there was no principle in their nature, which made them feel the obligations of duty, allegiance, and of gratitude. They could have no ideas corresponding to such terms; nor any conviction, that, independently of fear or interest, they were bound to regard, either him who made, or him who redeemed them.—This therefore, is to be held as a principle fundamental

in all religion: that there is in human nature, an approving or condemning sense of conduct; by means of which, *they who have not the law, are a law unto themselves.* They who, from a mistaken zeal for the honor of divine revelation, either deny the existence, or vilify the authority of natural religion, are not aware, that by disallowing the sense of obligation, they undermine the foundation on which revelation builds its power of commanding the heart.

An inward principle prompts us to do good to others, but with much greater authority, it checks and condemns us, when we have done them injuries. This part of the human constitution deserves to be remarked as a signal proof of the wisdom of its author, and of the gracious provision which he has made for the welfare of mankind. We are all committed in some measure to the care and assistance of one another. But our mutual influence reaches much farther with respect to the evils, than to the enjoyments of those around us. To advance their prosperity, is often beyond our ability; but to inflict injuries, is generally in our power; and at the same time, self interest very frequently tempts us to commit them. With the utmost propriety, we are so framed that the influence of the moral principle should be most authoritative, in cases where its aid is most needed; that to promote the happiness of others, should appear to us as praise worthy indeed, and generous, but that, to abstain from in-

juring them, should be felt as matter of the strictest duty.

Our natural sense of right and wrong produces an apprehension of merited punishment when we have committed a crime. When it is employed in surveying the behaviour of others, it distinguishes some actions, as laudable and excellent; and disapproves of others, as evil and base. But when it is directed upon our own conduct, it assumes a higher office, and exercises the authority of a judge. It is then properly termed conscience; and the sentiments which it awakens upon the perpetration of a crime, are styled remorse. Did not conscience suggest this natural relation between guilt and punishment, the mere principle of approbation, or disapprobation, with respect to moral conduct, would prove of small efficacy. For disapprobation attends, in some degree, every conviction of impropriety, or folly. When one has acted unsuitably to his interest, or has transgressed against the rules of prudence or decorum, he reflects upon his conduct with pain, and acknowledges that he deserves blame. But the difference between the sense of misconduct and the sense of guilt, consists in this, that the latter penetrates much deeper into the heart. It makes the criminal feel, that he is not only blameable, but justly punishable, for the part which he has acted. With reference to this office of conscience, the inspired writers frequently speak of it, in terms borrowed from the awful solemnities of judi-

cial procedure; as *bearing witness for or against us; accusing or excusing, judging and condemning.* It will be found, that in the language of most nations, terms of the same import are applied to the operations of conscience; expressing the sense which all mankind have, of its passing sentence upon them, and pronouncing rewards or punishments to be due to their actions.

During a course of prosperity, the operations of conscience are often suspended; and adversity is the season which restores them to their proper force. In truth, men differ as much from themselves, in prosperity and in adversity, as if they were different creatures. In prosperity every thing tends to flatter and deceive. In adversity, the illusions of life vanish. Its avocations, and its pleasures, no longer afford the sinner that shelter he was wont to find from conscience. Formerly he made a part of the crowd. He now feels himself a solitary individual, left alone with God, and with his own mind.

Hence we may perceive the great usefulness and propriety of that interchange of conditions, which takes place in human life. By prosperity God gives scope to our passions and makes trial of our dispositions. By adversity, he revives the serious principle within. Neither the one, nor the other, could be borne entire and unmixed. Man, always prosperous, would be giddy and insolent; always

afflicted, would be sullen and despondent. Hopes, and fears, joy and sorrow, are therefore so blended in his life, as both to give room for worldly pursuits, and to recall, from time to time, the admonitions of conscience. Of the proportions in which they should be mixed for this purpose, we are very incompetent judges. From our ignorance of the degree of discipline, which the spiritual state of others requires, we often censure providence unjustly, for its severity towards them. And from the vanity and rashness of our wishes, we complain without reason, of its rigor to ourselves. While we consult nothing but our ease, God attends to our spiritual improvement. When we seek what is pleasing, he sends what is useful.

ON THE LOVE OF PRAISE.

BLAIR.

AMONG men who had no regard to the approbation of one another, all intercourse would have been jarring and offensive. For wise ends, therefore, the desire of praise was made an original and powerful principle in the human breast. To a variety of good purposes it is subservient, and on many occasions co-operates with the principle of virtue. It awakens us from sloth, invigorates activity, and stimulates our efforts to excel. It has given rise to most of the splendid, and to many of

the useful enterprises of men. It has animated the patriot and fired the hero. Magnanimity, generosity, and fortitude, are what all mankind admire. Hence, such as were actuated by the desire of extensive fame, have been prompted to deeds which either participated of the spirit, or, at least, carried the appearance of distinguished virtue. The desire of praise is generally connected with all the finer sensibilities of human nature. It affords a ground on which exhortation, counsel, and reproof, can work a proper effect. Whereas to be entirely destitute of this passion, betokens an ignoble mind, on which no moral impression is easily made. Where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach; and if that be extinguished, one of the principal guards of virtue is removed, and the path opened to many opprobrious pursuits. He whose countenance never glowed with shame and whose heart never beat at the sound of praise, is not destined for any honorable distinction; is likely to grovel in the sordid quest of gain, or to slumber life away in the indolence of selfish pleasures.

Abstracting from the sentiments which are connected with the love of praise as a principle of action, the esteem of our fellow creatures is an object which, on account of the advantages it brings, may be lawfully pursued. It is necessary to our success in every affair and undertaking. Not only our private interest, but our public usefulness,

depends in a great measure upon it. The sphere of our influence is contracted or enlarged in proportion to the degree in which we enjoy the good opinion of the public. Men listen with an unwilling ear, to one whom they do not honor; while a respected character adds weight to example, and authority to counsel.

To desire the esteem of others for the sake of its effects, it is not only allowable, but in many cases is our duty; and to be totally indifferent to praise or censure, is so far from being a virtue, that it is a real defect in character. But we are to observe, that it has its boundary set; by transgressing which, it is at once transformed from an innocent into a most dangerous passion. More sacred and venerable principles claim the chief direction of human conduct. All the good effects which we have ascribed to the desire of praise, are produced by it when remaining in a subordinate station. But when, passing its natural line, it becomes the ruling spring of conduct; when the regard which we pay to the opinions of men, encroaches on that reverence which we owe to the voice of conscience and the sense of duty; the love of praise having then gone out of its proper place, instead of improving, corrupts; and instead of elevating, debases our nature. The proportion which this passion holds to the other principles of action, is what renders it either innocent or criminal.

Even in cases where there is no direct competition between our duty and our fancied honor, between the praise of men and the praise of God, the passion for applause may become criminal, by occupying the place of a better principle. When vain glory usurps the throne of virtue; when ostentation produces actions which conscience ought to have dictated; such actions however specious, have no claim to moral or religious praise. We know that good deeds done merely to be seen of men, lose their reward with God. If, on occasion of some trying conjuncture, which makes us hesitate concerning our line of conduct, the first question which occurs to us be, not whether an action is right in itself, and such as a good man ought to perform, but whether it is such as will find acceptance with the world, and be favorable to our fame, the conclusion is too evident, that the desire of applause has obtained an undue ascendant. What a wise and good man ought to study, is to preserve his mind free from any such solicitude concerning praise, as may be in hazard of overcoming his sense of duty. The approbation of man he may wish to obtain, as far as is consistent with the approbation of God. But when both cannot be enjoyed together, there ought to be no suspense. He is to retire, contented with the testimony of a good conscience; and to shew, by the firmness of his behaviour, that, in the cause of truth and virtue, he is superior to all opinion.

The praise of men is not an object of such value in itself, as to be entitled to become the leading principle of conduct. We degrade our character, when we allow it more than subordinate regard. Like other worldly goods, it is apt to dazzle us with a false lustre; but if we would ascertain its true worth, let us reflect both on whom it is bestowed, and from whom it proceeds. Were the applause of the world, always the reward of merit; were it appropriated to such a love as by real abilities, or by worthy actions, are entitled to rise above the crowd, we might justly be flattered by possessing a rare and valuable distinction. But how far is this from being the case in fact? How often have the despicable and the vile, by dexterously catching the favor of the multitude, soared upon the wings of popular applause, while the virtuous and the deserving have been either buried in obscurity, or obliged to encounter the attacks of unjust reproach.

An excessive love of praise never fails to undermine the regard due to conscience, and to corrupt the heart. It turns off the eye of the mind from the ends which it ought chiefly to keep in view; and sets up a false light for its guide, Its influence is the more dangerous, as the colour which it assumes is often fair; and its garb and appearance are nearly allied to that of virtue. The love of glory, may give birth to actions, which are both splendid and useful. At a distance, they strike the eye, with uncommon brightness; but, on a nearer and stricter

survey, their lustre is often tarnished. They are found to want that sacred and venerable dignity which characterises true virtue. All is magnanimity, generosity, and courage, to public view. But the ignoble source whence these seeming virtues take their rise is hidden. Consult such as have been intimately acquainted with the followers of renown; and seldom or never will you find that they held them in the same esteem with those who viewed them from afar. There is nothing except simplicity of intention, and purity of principle, that can stand the test of near approach and strict examination.

ON THE DESIRE OF KNOWLEDGE.

JORTIN.

THE desire of knowledge is in some sense natural to us all; and it is our duty to cherish that desire, to direct it to proper objects, and to keep it within due bounds. Knowledge is necessary for us, not only to manage the affairs of this life, but also to perform the service of our Maker. Conscience may dictate to us that things are right, or wrong, decent or indecent; and conscience may be mistaken in her decisions, unless she call in reason to her assistance; for a clear knowledge of morality cannot be obtained without serious consideration, and the exercise of our intellectual faculties; nor

can the revealed will of God, be understood without application of mind.

We at first receive the knowledge of things by perception, and then improve it by reflection. To acquire wisdom, and make ourselves masters of useful sciences, much thought, industry, and study are required. Our memory also seldom faithfully retains the first impressions, except they be repeated; so that recollection, practice, and habit are necessary to render us expert. Since then knowledge is so expedient for us, and cannot be acquired without labour, it was proper that we should have such a desire of it, as would excite us to search for it, and make the pursuit of it the more entertaining. In other cases, we see that men have strong propensities after those things, which they account necessary to their support, and which they would else be disposed to neglect, because of the troubles and fatigue which usually attends the acquisition and preservation of them.

This general desire of knowledge is manifested very soon. We see how early curiosity exerts itself in healthy and lively children, how they gaze at every new object, and reach at any thing that is near, how apt are they to ask questions, and to inquire the names and natures of things. This inclination grows up with us, and no one can be contented to be wholly ignorant, but is for gratifying one way or other the inherent propensity. It must

indeed be owned that some persons seem to have very little of this desire; but it is not from them that we are to make an estimate of mankind; as we must not conclude, that man is not a rational creature, because some make little or no use of their reason. Such indolence is very often rather a fault of their will, than a defect in their nature; and we do not say that this appetite is equally strong in all men, any more than the other inclinations.

The good of civil society, which requires that there should be men of low, as well as of high rank, seems also to require an unequal distribution of the temper and abilities of the mind. It is meet that there should be men of smaller, as well as of larger capacities, that they may be fitted for different ways of life; and this also makes it expedient that there should be various degrees of this propensity towards knowledge. But as all have need of some measure of knowledge, we may conclude that they usually have the desire of it in some degree. There have in all times been some who have taken extraordinary pains to improve their understandings. They have despised riches, and renounced honors, abstained from pleasures, and in silent retirement from the busy world, have sought after truth, with clear and undisturbed minds. They have endured hardships, and have travelled by sea, and by land, to learn the laws, the manners, the religions, and the sciences of other nations. They have neglected both rest and food, to study the liberal arts, and to

search into nature. Such has been their unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Those illustrious persons, in very ancient times, to whose labours, the world is so much indebted, seem to have been raised by providence for the benefit of mankind. Like the sun, in his progress through the heavens, they brought their light from the eastern countries, and with it illuminated those western parts; and by their learned industry, the understandings of men were refined, and their lives were civilized, and thus the world became in some measure prepared for the reception of the gospel.

The pleasure of any creature consists in having objects suitable to its faculties. Knowledge therefore must be agreeable to an intelligent being, and as pleasant to the intellectual part, as is a fine prospect to the eye, or harmonious sounds to the ear. Many there are who spend much time and pains in very useless speculations and unprofitable studies, and in so doing, find amusement and satisfaction, from a false taste and from a want of judgment. Yet even these seek and find a sort of knowledge; for novelty is knowledge, or something resembling it. But far superior is the pleasure of those who have applied themselves to the disquisition of nobler subjects, and of sublimer truths. We read of contemplative persons, who having found out the solution of difficult problems which had long perplexed them, were so overcome with joy, as to be almost beside themselves. When new scenes of truth open

upon the eye of the understanding, an agreeable admiration is excited, and is the greater for the present, when any considerable point of knowledge accidentally offers itself, which lay concealed before. We have pleasure when we have found what we have sought, and still more when we find it unexpectedly, and without previous pains, for we love knowledge more than we love labour; knowledge we love for its own sake, and labour, only for the sake of that knowledge which it produces.

The holy scriptures bear witness to this, as it may be concluded from those figures of speech by which ignorance and knowledge are there represented to us. Ignorance is styled darkness, which is disagreeable; and truth is called light, which it is pleasant to behold. The kingdom of heaven, says our Saviour, is like unto treasure hid in a field, which a man having found, he hideth it, and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he has, and buyeth that field. It must have been great joy indeed, which induced those who first embraced the gospel, so cheerfully to renounce all the advantages and endure all the evils of this life, for the glorious prospect of a blessed immortality.

He who seeks for satisfaction in the enjoyments of this world, will assuredly be disappointed; for these things were not designed to be the supreme happiness of man. We have eager desires after complete felicity, which can never be satisfied by earthly

objects. They are also too uncertain and too imperfect, to give us full contentment. The pleasures of this world, are like the sensitive plant; they look fair and flourishing at a distance, but when we come to touch them, they shrink and wither away.

It becomes us as rational agents, to acquire knowledge in general; and religious knowledge in particular, "Fear God, and keep his commandments;" for this is the whole duty of man; this is his main duty and interest, this is his pleasure and his happiness.

ON THE YOKE OF CHRIST.

JORTIN.

It would be a most convenient thing for the children of men, if pleasure and duty could always go together; for, as they have a strong inclination to pleasure, they must needs perform their duty very coldly and superficially, if they take no pleasure in it. And yet, in the present state of imperfection, the opinion and taste of many persons is so depraved, that pleasure seems to them not at all consistent with duty, nor duty with pleasure. Hence it is, that, from this struggle between obligation and inclination, they become guilty and unhappy at the same time. Their reason tells them, that duty

must be performed; their heart inclines them to irregular pleasure; and this very pleasure is embittered by reproofs of reason, and remorse of conscience.

Our Saviour proposes to rectify these errors and remove these evils, and like a wise and kind master, invites us to come to him, and be cured of our false taste and our prejudices, and delivered from an uneasy and self-condemned condition. Come to me, and take upon you my yoke and my burden.

The yoke and burden of Christ is his religion, and more particularly that part of it which relates to practice; concerning which St. John says, "that his commandments are not grievous." The assertion seems hard to be reconciled with the inclinations and behaviour of many, who account the precepts of the gospel to be extremely rigid and difficult. Morality is the most difficult part of christianity. There are doctrines relating to faith, and faith, which is the belief of things not seen, requires an inquisitive, sober, and religious temper, together with a docility and submission of mind. But yet amongst us, absolute unbelief is not the predominant defect. On the contrary, many are indolent and lazy in points relating to faith; and thinking it less fatiguing to assent, than to examine, they believe, or fancy that they believe, without much reflection. Whether such a faith as this can be

excusable, or suitable to the nature of a reasonable creature, I shall not at present inquire. I speak only of matter of fact; and assert that in the Christian world, the easier task is to believe, and the more difficult, is to practise. And thus to the shame and disgrace of men, virtue and goodness, the religion of Christ, becomes only a troublesome yoke. He who has given loose to his irregular passions, thinks it difficult to shake off ambition, covetousness, rapaciousness, revenge and worldly pleasures, and to live soberly, righteously, and piously. This is the yoke and the burden.

In religion every thing is easier to a corrupted mind, than the practice of virtue. Superstition steps in to the aid of immorality, and gives a sinner the flattering hope that by a rigid observation of externals, he may compound with God for the neglect of goodness.

It is remarkable that there is always more zeal and submission to be found in those who are devoted to a false or a fanatical religion, than in those who profess a true and reasonable one. This may seem strange, but it is quite natural. In false or depraved religions, almost the whole system consists in unintelligible doctrines, in ceremony, outside show, and bodily devotion; and this is easier than improvement of mind, and amendment of manners. It is easier to go a pilgrimage or to stroll about the world, than to renounce one bad habit; it is easier

for a man to chastise, than to mend himself, and to tell his beads, than to quit his vices; it is easier to talk, or to hear others talk, all day about Christ, and about faith and grace, than to forgive injuries, and to be chaste and pure in heart.

Natural religion, before our Saviour came, was miserably defaced, almost sunk in oblivion, in a weak and languishing state, without spirit, without strength, without efficacy. God sent his Son to quicken and revive it, and to recommend it to the world. To engage men to the practice of it, our Lord employs the strongest of all motives—the promise of immortality, and the fear of losing this blessed reward, and of exchanging it for incurable misery. The Christian religion, is a religion of morality; and that part of it which relates to faith, was revealed for the purpose of persuading and assisting us, to keep the moral law, and to account it an easy yoke and a light burden.

Let us consider some of those precepts, which seem to be harsh and irksome. The forgiveness of injuries is a Christian duty; I consider it also a natural duty. Christianity prescribes nothing upon this subject, but what the human understanding knows and feels to be right. It knows that there is a God, governor and judge of all, and that it is therefore fit to leave him to be the avenger of injuries, or to leave it to those, who by his providence are appointed to be his ministers, and the public

dispensers of justice. The light of nature goes yet farther than this. It teaches us that there is more greatness of mind, in forgiving than in revenging injuries; that the latter is an effect of weakness, the former of courage.

Self denial is another Christian duty, and is only thought a rigid law, by those who, judging from the mere sound of the word, contend against a phantom of their own forming. Let us set the world aside and examine the thing.—To deny one's self is only to deny and renounce one's vices; and natural religion requires this. To deny one's self, is to return home to one's self: it is to quit that self which is foolish, stubborn, and unruly, and to become a reasonable self. It is to cease from being what we are, and to become what we ought to be, and what we would wish the world to think us to be. From all these considerations we conclude, that christianity is of its own nature a very easy yoke, and a very light burden, and carries in it, the character of its wise, mild, and beneficent Author. For it cannot be an unreasonable demand to ask of men such things as their own conscience owns to be just, to expect that reasonable creatures, should listen to the voice of reason, to desire of them that they would not be their own enemies, that they would love themselves better than they commonly do, and exchange a pernicious self-love, which fills their lives with bitterness, trouble, and remorse, into a profitable and prudent self-affection, which

makes this life smooth and easy, and is a guide to life eternal.

Christianity is equitable in itself, and is entitled to favors and assistances sufficient to soften all that may seem irksome in its strictest precepts. The Christian has in the first place, the approbation of his Lord and Master, who observes his conduct, and will reward his obedience. He has also the approbation of men, who generally command what is right and decent.—Our Lord has expressly said, to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; which is a promise to every honest and industrious servant, that God will concur with his endeavours, smoothing the way for him, and removing obstacles, and inspiring him with wisdom, knowledge, resolution and joy.

The nature of Christian truths is such, that every one who duly meditates upon them, will find sufficient incitement to his duty. The better we know God, the more we are disposed to love and obey him. The contemplation of the universe, considered as the work of God, discovers such perfections in the Author of all good, that the mind is filled with admiration, gratitude, serious pleasure, and a religious awe and reverence, which are no small part of the worship of God.

What stronger motive can be conceived to well doing than immortal happiness? and what would not

a wise man give or endure to secure it? If the hope of an uncertain gain encourages the merchant to undertake long and dangerous voyages; if the desire of rising to high stations will teach the proud and ambitious to submit to a thousand meannesses and inconveniences; if the flattering pleasure of a criminal passion will enduce the sensual to sacrifice every thing that ought to be dear to him; how much more should the prospect of endless happiness reconcile us to our reasonable service and duty? After this, let the irreligious go their ways, and follow their devices, and at last accuse themselves as much as they will of folly and madness; for the accusation is just; but let them not accuse the amiable gospel of Christ, and add to all their other faults that of reproaching and slandering so kind an institution, and of calling it a yoke which is not easy, and a burden which is not light.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE HEART.

BLAIR.

It is the state of the heart, which determines our moral character. The tenor of our actions will always correspond to the dispositions that prevail within. To dissemble, or to suppress them, is a fruitless attempt. In spite of our efforts, they will perpetually break forth in our behaviour. On what-

ever side the weight of inclination hangs, it will draw the practice after it. In vain, therefore, you study to preserve your hands clean, unless you resolve at the same time to keep your heart pure. If that fountain be once poisoned, you can never expect that salubrious streams will flow from it. Throughout the whole of their course, they will carry the taint of the parent spring.

The state of the heart, not only determines our moral character, but forms our principal happiness or misery. External situations of fortune are no farther of consequence, than as they operate on the heart; and their operation there is far from corresponding to the degree of worldly prosperity or adversity. If, from any internal cause, a man's peace of mind be disturbed, in vain you load him with all the honors or riches which the world can bestow. They remain without, like things at a distance from him. They reach not the source of enjoyment. Discomposed thoughts, agitated passions, and a ruffled temper, poison every ingredient of pleasure which the world holds out; and overcast every object which presents itself, with a melancholy gloom. In order to acquire a capacity of happiness, it must be our first study to rectify such inward disorders. Whatever discipline tends to accomplish this purpose, is of greater importance to man, than the acquisition of the advantages of fortune. These are precarious, and doubtful in their effect; internal tranquillity is a certain good.

These are only means, but that is the end. These are no more than instruments of satisfaction, that is satisfaction itself.

The moral regulation of our thoughts is the particular test of our reverence for God. If we restrain our passions from breaking forth into open disorders, while we abandon our imagination in secret to corruption, we show that virtue rests with us upon regard to men; and that however we may act a part in public with propriety, there is before our eyes no fear of that God who *searcheth the heart*, and *requireth truth in the inward parts*. But even abstracting from this awful consideration, the government of our thoughts must appear to be of high consequence, from their direct influence on conduct. It is plain that thought gives the first impulse to every principle of action. Actions are in truth, no other than thoughts ripened into consistency and substance. So certain is this, that to judge with precision of the character of any man, and to foretel with confidence what part he will act, no more is requisite, than to be rendered capable of viewing the current of thought, which passes most frequently within him. Though by such a method we have no access to judge of one another, yet thus it is always in our power to judge of ourselves. Each of us, by impartially scrutinizing his indulged and favorite thoughts, may discover the whole secret of his real character. This consideration alone, is suffi-

cient to show of what importance the government of thought is, to the *keeping of the heart*.

But, supposing us convinced of its importance, a question may arise, how far it is within our power, and in what degree thoughts are subject to the command of the will? It is plain, that they are not always the offspring of choice. Often they are inevitably impressed upon the mind by surrounding objects. Often they start up, as of themselves, without any principle of introduction which we are able to trace. *As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whether it goeth*, equally rapid in all its transitions, and inscrutable in its progress, is the course of thought, having a long train of connections which are too delicate for our observation, it defeats all endeavours either to explore or to stop its path. Hence vain and fantastic imaginations sometimes break in upon the most settled attention, and disturb even the devout exercises of pious minds. Instances of this sort must be placed to the account of human frailty. They are misfortunes to be deplored, rather than crimes to be condemned; and our gracious Creator, *who knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*, will not be severe in marking every such error, and wandering of the mind. But, after these allowances are made, still there remains much scope for the proper government of thought; and a multitude of cases occur, in which we are no

less accountable for what we think, than for what we do.

In order to govern our thoughts, we should study to acquire the habit of attention to them. No study is more important, for in proportion to the degree in which this habit is possessed, such commonly is the degree of intellectual improvement. It is the power of attention which in a great measure distinguishes the wise and the great from the vulgar and trifling herd of men. The latter are accustomed to think, or rather to dream without knowing the subject of their thoughts. In their unconnected rovings they pursue no ends; they follow no track. Every thing floats loose and disjointed on the surface of their mind; like leaves scattered and blown about on the face of the waters.

In order to lead your thoughts into any useful direction, your first care must be, to acquire the power of fixing them, and of restraining their irregular motions. Inure yourself to form a plan of proper meditation; to pursue it steadily; and with severe authority to keep the door shut, against the intrusions of wandering fancy. Let your mind for this purpose, become a frequent object to itself. Let your thoughts be made the subject of thought and review. "To what is my attention at present "directed? Could I disclose it without a blush to "the world? Were God instantly to call me into "judgment, what account could I give of it to him?

"Shall I be the wiser or the better, for dwelling on "such thoughts, as now fill my mind? Are they "entirely consistent with my innocence, and with "my present and future peace? If they are not, "to what purpose do I indulge such unprofitable or "dangerous musings?" By frequent exercise of this inward scrutiny, we might gradually bring imagination under discipline, and turn the powers of thought to their proper use as means of improvement, instead of suffering them to be only the instruments of vanity and guilt.

ON RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT.

BLAIR.

THE advantages of retiring from the world, to commune with our heart, will be found to be great, whether we regard our happiness in this world, or our preparation for the world to come. Let us consider them first with respect to our happiness in this world. It will readily occur to you, that an entire retreat from wordly affairs, is not what religion requires; nor does it even enjoin a total retreat from them. Some stations of life would not permit this, and there are few stations which render it necessary. The chief field, both of the duty and of the improvement of man, lies in active life. By the graces and virtues which he exercises amidst his fellow creatures, he is trained up for heaven.

A total retreat from the world, is so far from being the perfection of religion, that some particular cases excepted, it is no other than the abuse of it.

But though an entire retreat would lay us aside from the part for which providence chiefly intended us, it is certain, that without occasional retreat, we must act that part very ill. There will be neither consistency in the conduct, nor dignity in the character, of one who sets apart no share of his time for meditation and reflection. In the heat and bustle of life, while passion is every moment throwing false colors on the objects around us, nothing can be viewed in a just light. If you wish that reason should exert her native power, you must step aside from the crowd, into the cool and silent shade. It is there that, with a sober and steady eye, she examines what is good or ill, what is wise or foolish, in human conduct; she looks back on the past, she looks forward to the future; and forms plans, not for the present moment only, but for the whole of life. How should that man perform any part of his duty aright, who never suffers his passions to cool? And how should his passions cool, who is engaged, without intermission, in the tumult of the world? This incessant stir raises that eager fermentation of spirit, which will ever be sending forth the dangerous fumes of rashness and folly. Whereas he who mingles religious retreat with worldly affairs, remains calm, and master of himself. He is not

whirled round, and rendered giddy, by the agitations of the world; but from that sacred retirement, in which he has been conversant among higher objects, comes forth into the world with manly tranquillity, fortified by the principles which he has formed, and prepared for whatsoever may befall.

As he who is unacquainted with retreat, cannot sustain any character with propriety, so neither can he enjoy the world with any advantage. Of the two classes of men who are most apt to be negligent of this duty, the men of pleasure and the men of business, it is hard to say which suffers most in point of enjoyment from that neglect.—If uninterrupted intercourse with the world, wear out the man of pleasure, it no less oppresses the man of business and ambition. The strongest spirits must at length sink under it. The happiest temper must be soured by incessant returns of the opposition, the inconstancy, and treachery of men. For he who lives always in the bustle of the world, lives in a perpetual warfare. Here an enemy encounters; there a rival supplants him. The ingratitude of a friend stings him this hour; and the pride of a superior wounds him the next. In vain he flies for relief to trifling amusements. These may afford a temporary opiate to care; but they communicate no strength to the mind. On the contrary, they leave it more soft and defenceless, when molestations and injuries renew their attack.

Let him who wishes for an effectual cure to all the wounds which the world can inflict, retire from intercourse with men to intercourse with God. When he enters into his closet, and shuts the door, let him shut out at the same time, all intrusion of worldly care; and dwell among objects divine and immortal. Those fair prospects of order and peace shall open to his view, which form the most perfect contrast to the confusion and misery of this earth.—From such objects, there beams upon the mind of the pious man, a pure and enlivening light; there is diffused over his heart a holy calm. His agitated spirit reassumes its firmness, and regains its peace. The world sinks in its importance; and the load of mortality and misery loses almost all its weight.

With good reason the Christian is exhorted *not to be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of his mind.* Our conversation and intercourse with the world is, in several respects, an education for vice. From our earliest youth we are accustomed to hear riches and honors extolled as the chief possessions of man; and proposed to us, as the principal aim of our future pursuits. We are trained up, to look, with admiration on the flattering marks of distinction which they bestow. In quest of these fancied blessings, we see the multitude around us eager and fervent. Principles of duty, we may perhaps hear sometimes inculcated; but we seldom behold them brought into competition with

worldly profit. The soft names and plausible colors, under which deceit, sensuality, and revenge, are presented to us in common discourse, weaken, by degrees, our natural sense of the distinction between good and evil. We often meet with crimes authorised by high examples, and rewarded with the caresses and smiles of the world. We discover perhaps at last, that those whom we are taught to reverence, and regard as our patterns of conduct, act upon principles no purer than those of others. Thus breathing habitually, a contagious air, how certain is our ruin unless we sometimes retreat from this pestilential region, and seek for proper correctives of the disorders which are contracted there?

Religious retirement both abates the disease, and furnishes the remedy. It lessens the corrupting influence of the world; and it gives opportunity for better principles to exert their power. He who is accustomed to turn aside, and commune with himself, will, sometimes at least hear the truths which the multitude do not tell him. A more sound instructor will lift his voice, and awaken within the heart those latent suggestions, which the world had overpowered and suppressed.

PROPER SUBJECTS FOR MEDITATION

BLAIR.

THE great and the worthy, the pious and the virtuous, have ever been addicted to serious retirement. It is the characteristic of little and frivolous minds to be wholly occupied with the vulgar objects of life. A refined and enlarged mind, leaves the world behind it, feels a call for higher pleasures, and seeks them in retreat. The man of public spirit has recourse to it, in order to form plans for general good; the man of genius, in order to dwell on his favorite themes; the philosopher, to pursue his discoveries; the saint, to improve himself in grace.

The advantages of religious retirement will appear, if we consider those great objects, which should there employ our thoughts. I shall mention three,—God,—the world,—and our own character. Impressions of Deity, besides their being the principle of what is strictly termed religion, are the great support of all moral sentiment, and virtuous conduct among men. But with what difficulty are they preserved in any due degree of force amidst the affairs and avocations of the world?

Let him who retires to serious meditation begin with impressing deeply on his mind this important

truth, that there is undoubtedly a Supreme Governor, who presides over the universe. But let him not imagine that to commune with his heart concerning God, is to search into the mysteries of the divine nature, or to attempt a discovery of the whole plan of providence. Long enough he may bewilder himself in this maze, without making any proficiency in the practical knowledge of God. Shall he who knows so little of his own nature, or of the nature of the objects with which he is surrounded, expect to comprehend the Being who made him? To commune with ourselves, to any useful purpose on this subject, is to bring home to our souls the internal authoritative sense of God, as of a Sovereign and a Father! It is not to speculate about what is mysterious in his essence, but to contemplate what is displayed of his perfections. It is to realize the presence of the Supreme Being, so as to produce the most profound veneration; and to awaken the earnest desire of as near an approach as our nature will permit, to that great Fountain of happiness and life.

In the midst of your solitary musings, lift your eyes, and behold all nature full of God. Look up to the firmament, and admire his glory. Look round on the earth, and observe his presence every where displayed. If the gay landscape, or the fruitful field, present themselves to your eye, behold him smiling upon his works. If the mountain raise its lofty head, or the expanse of waters roll

its tide before you, contemplate, in those great and solemn objects, his power and majesty. Nature in all its diversities, is a varied manifestation of the Deity!—He fills and animates all space. In the barren wilderness, as in the peopled region, you can trace his footsteps; and in the deepest solitude you may hear a voice which testifies of him.

Commune with your heart, in the season of retirement concerning the world. The world is the great deceiver, whose fallacious arts it highly imports us to detect. But, in the midst of its pleasures and pursuits, the detection is impossible. We tread, as within an enchanted circle, where nothing appears as it truly is. It is only in retreat that the charm can be broken. Did men employ that retreat, not in carrying on the delusions which the world has began, not in forming plans of imaginary bliss, but in subjecting the happiness which the world affords to a strict discussion, the spell would dissolve; and in the room of the unreal prospects which had long amused them, the nakedness of the world would appear.—While others meditate in secret on the means of attaining worldly success, let it be your employment to scrutinize that success itself. Calculate fairly, to what it amounts, and whether you are not losers on the whole, by your apparent gain.

Commune with your own heart, concerning your real character. To acquire a thorough knowledge

of ourselves is an attainment no less difficult than important. For men are generally unwilling to see their own imperfections; and when they are willing to inquire into them, their self-love imposes on their judgment.—It has been said, that there are three characters which every man sustains; and these often extremely different from one another; one, which he possesses in his own opinion; another which he carries in the estimation of the world; and a third, which he bears in the judgment of God. It is only the last which ascertains what he really is.—Whether the character which the world forms of you, be above or below the truth, it imports you not much to know. But it is of eternal consequence, that the character which you possess, in your own eyes, be formed upon that, which you bear in the sight of God. In order to try it by this great standard, you must lay aside as much as possible all partiality to yourselves; and in the season of retirement, explore your heart with such accurate scrutiny, as may bring your hidden defects to light.

Inquire for this purpose, whether you be not conscious, that the fair opinion which the world entertains of you, is founded on their partial knowledge both of your abilities, and your virtues? Would you be willing that all your actions should be publicly canvassed? Could you bear to have your thoughts laid open? Are there no parts of your life, which you would be uneasy if an enemy could discover? In what light then, must these

appear to God? When you have kept free from vice, has your innocence proceeded from purity of principle, or from worldly motives? Rises there no envy or malignity within you, when you compare your own condition with that of others? Have you been as solicitous to regulate your heart, as to preserve your manners from reproach? Professing yourselves Christians, has the spirit of Christ appeared in your conduct? Declaring that you hope for immortality, has that hope surmounted undue attachments to the present life?

Such investigation as this, seriously pursued, might produce to every man many discoveries of himself; discoveries not pleasing perhaps to vanity, but salutary and useful. For he can be only a flatterer, but no true friend to himself, who aims not at knowing his own defects as well as virtues.

ON THE DUTY OF HEARING.

JORTIN.

In all civilized nations there is no art that has been more diligently pursued, cultivated, and improved than the art of discoursing. The design of this important art should be to instruct and to persuade; for as to mere amusement, that is an insignificant affair, and consequently a knowledge of the subject to be discussed, a clear method, and a proper

choice of proofs and words are necessary in such discourses, which ought to consist of good sense, clothed in good language.

Of all the various subjects of discourse, it will I presume, be readily allowed by serious and sensible people, that morality or religion is the most important, and the best deserving the pains that can be bestowed upon it.

But let me here desire you to observe, that there is another art of equal importance, and of equal concern, and yet much neglected, and that is, the art of hearing; of hearing so as to profit by the things that are said. For when the minds of the hearers are well disposed, even a moderate skill in the speaker will have a due effect; and where every good disposition is wanting on their side, even reason and eloquence joined together will be unavailing. Our Saviour himself, he who spake as never man spake before or since, even he did not work the same conviction in the minds of all those who had the favorable opportunity of hearing those words of grace and truth which proceeded from his mouth. The difference of reception which his gospel found, according to the different dispositions of his hearers, gave occasion to his most instructive parable of the sower. He closes it, with this solemn admonition, *Take heed how ye hear; for whosoever hath*, that is whosoever is improved by hearing, *he shall have more; and whosoever hath not*,—that is, whosoever

heareth to no good purpose, *even that which he seemeth to have, shall be taken away from him.*

That we may hear with profit, it is required that we hear with attention.—By hearing the word of God when it is delivered to us, by reading it, and by meditating upon it, we may acquire divine wisdom, wisdom unto salvation. And if in the search of it, there were much toil and trouble, yet the acquisition would repay all the labour and industry that is bestowed upon it.—But when this useful knowledge is to be had at an easy rate, by attending upon the public worship of God, and giving heed to the things which are there read and taught; it must be a strange contempt of God's ordinances and of his favors, to hear as though we heard not, with the utmost inattention and indifference, and sometimes with dispositions still worse than mere negligence.

Discernment or the exercise of private judgment, is also necessary for hearing with profit. As every human teacher man is frail and fallible, and may possibly either deceive, or be deceived himself, it becomes every hearer not to pay a blind deference to his teacher, and follow his opinions at all adventures, with implicit faith, especially in the great and important points of moral and religious duties. Whoever undertakes to instruct, persuade, or convince another, puts himself properly in the place of a pleader or advocate; and whoever is his auditor is properly in the place of a judge, who is

to determine whether the pleader makes out his point or no.—This right of private judgment is inherent in every man; it is the privilege of reason and liberty; but then it must be exercised with great care, caution and discretion, and with proper restrictions and limitations. A hearer must not presume too far upon his own knowledge and abilities, and determine without sufficient qualifications.

Impartiality, is another qualification necessary in the hearer.—There is in many people a bent to receive such doctrines as are pleasing to them, and to reject those which are harsh and disagreeable; to be very scrupulous about the latter, to cavil at them, and be unwilling to give them a fair hearing; to catch at God's promises, and to overlook or weaken the threatenings which he denounces against sin, especially against such sins as they themselves commit. Hence it is, that when the ministers of the gospel urge the necessity of a holy life, and exhort to sobriety, temperance, strict justice, purity, and chastity, diligence, industry, meekness, patience, forgiveness of injuries, liberality and charity, they are by some people disliked and despised, as men who do not preach Jesus Christ, dry moralists, unedifying teachers, friends to human reason and free will, and foes to the free grace of the gospel.—Thus does prejudice and partiality, joined to gross ignorance, corrupt the minds of men, expose them to be led away by false guides, and hinder that good influence which the word of God might otherwise

have upon their lives and conversation; of which unfair dealing with the scripture, with those who explain it, and indeed with themselves, there has been, and there are too many instances.

Meekness, docility, and candour, are also required in hearers.—Every one carries in his breast a false friend, against whose insinuations he ought to be upon his guard; and that deceiver is self love. If men would receive profit by hearing the word of God preached to them, they must be sure to hear it with humility, patience, and good temper, without any ill-will; nay, with some degree of good will, towards those who deliver it. If religious and spiritual reproof were really an injury offered to us; if it proceeded from spleen and malice; if it were designed for our detriment; yet like other wrongs and affronts, it should be borne with patience;—but, since reproof hath a real tendancy to our good; since it is an act of justice, and even of friendship and of Christian charity; they who give it us, have a title not only to our forgiveness, but to our thanks; and they who receive admonition with thankful minds, will make a proper application of it to the benefit of their own souls.

HOPES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS.

BLAIR.

When no warnings of our approaching change appear, we are all inclined to look forward to futurity with a smile; and to indulge the hope that *to-morrow shall be as this day, and even more abundantly*. Hence in the lives of thoughtless men, there breaks forth so much folly and presumption, so much pride and levity, and often so much impiety and contempt of religion.

On the lot of some men, providence is pleased to bestow a longer continuance of prosperity, than in that of others. But as the term of that continuance is hidden from us, all flattering and confident expectations are without foundation. At one period or another, it is certain that the calm is to be troubled, and the dark cloud is to arise; and how soon that period is to come, you cannot tell. In your health, or your fortune, or among your connections and friends, be assured that some trial awaits you. For human life never stands still for any long time. It is by no means a fixed and steady object, like the mountain on the rock, which you always find in the same situation: it is a river continually moving and flowing. Neither is it the still,

smooth stream, which glides along with the same constant tenor; but a river which for a time may hold a regular course, within its banks, till, being interrupted by rocks, it foams into a torrent, or swoln by foreign currents, it lays waste the neighbouring plains.—Amidst such vicissitudes of time and life, who has any title to reckon upon the future? To faults all are subject; to troubles, all are exposed. As that man is the most virtuous, who can be charged with the fewest faults, so that life is the happiest which suffers the fewest troubles. To look for entire exemption from them is to court disappointment.

We are not to expect from our intercourse with others, all that satisfaction which we fondly wish. What the individual either enjoys or suffers by himself, exhibits only an imperfect view of his condition. In the present state of human affairs, we are all so closely interwoven with one another, that a very material part of our happiness or misery arises from the connections which we have with those who are around us, and the relations in which we stand to them. These, therefore, open a field within which our wishes and expectations find an ample range. One of the first objects of wish to every one is to maintain a proper place and rank in society; not to fall behind his equals; but rather, if he can, to surpass them, so as to command consideration and respect from his neighbours. This among the vain and ambitious, is always the favorite aim.

With them it rises to immoderate expectations, founded on their supposed talents and imagined merits. But perhaps in the hearts of all men, some wish of this nature lurks; some wish not to be overlooked in the crowd, but to attain that degree of distinction which they conceive they might reasonably claim.

With respect to claims of this sort, it is to be apprehended that, among persons of all characters and descriptions many an expectation must perish, and many a disappointment be endured. For such is the power which the sophistry of self-love exercises over us, that almost every one may be assured that he measures himself by a deceitful scale; that he places the point of his own merit at a higher degree than others will admit that it reaches. All are jealous of the high pretensions of others. Were expectations more moderate, they would be more favorably received. Did we more rarely attempt to push ourselves into notice, the world would more readily allow us, nay, sometimes assist us, to come forward. Were we content sometimes to remain in the shade, we should with more advantage come forth into sunshine, and find the brightness interrupted by fewer clouds.

In the closer connections which men form of intimate friendship and domestic life, there is still more reason for due moderation in our expectations and hopes. For the nearer that men approach to each

other, the more numerous the points of contact are in which they touch, the greater indeed will be the pleasure of perfect symphony and agreement of feelings, but at the same time, if any harsh and repulsive sensations take place, the more grating and pungent will be the pain.—If you look for a friend or partner of your life, in whose temper there is not to be found the least inequality, who upon no occasion is to be hurt or offended by any frailties you discover, whose feelings are to harmonize in every trifle with yours, whose countenance is always to reflect the image of your own; you look for a pleasing phantom, which is never, or, at most, very rarely to be found; and if disappointment sour your mind, you have your own folly to blame. You ought to have considered that you live in a region of human infirmity, where every one has imperfections and failings, you assuredly have your own. What reason had you to imagine, that the person whom you love and esteem, was to be the only exception from the common fate? Here, if any where, it becomes you to overlook and forbear; and never to allow small failings to dwell on your attention so much as to deface the whole of an amiable character. From trifling misunderstandings arising from the most frivolous causes, springs much of the misery of social and domestic life. Hence is blasted many a pleasing blossom of hope; and many an expectation, which once promised unbroken harmony is left to perish.

A good man has ground to expect that any external condition into which, in the course of human affairs, he may pass, shall, by means of virtue and wisdom, be rendered, if not perfectly agreeable, yet tolerably easy to him. That distresses of various kinds are scattered through the life of every mortal man, there can be no doubt. But it is also to be remembered, that to many distresses there are remedies which it is in our power to apply; and that with all sorrows, some comforts are mixed. A wise and good man enjoys the hope of either finding or making his state tolerable to himself. He is never left without resources to assist those exertions which he makes in his own behalf. Roses indeed are not always strewed in his path, but from fields that are seemingly waste, flowers may be gathered by those, who look carefully around them. Seldom or never do all good things forsake, and all evils beset a man at once. In some corner of our lot there are always comforts that may be found, if we be not so foolish as to overlook them. Even in the intervals of sickness and pain, satisfactions may be enjoyed. Returns of relief are often felt with a more lively sensation of pleasure, than what we taste in unbroken health. In the most disconsolate condition, there lies always a secret hope, that better days may come.

From such circumstances as these, the expectation of passing through life with some measure of

comfort, may reasonably be entertained by such as are not wanting to themselves in propriety of conduct. In looking forward to futurity, the prospect we are to take of the world is not that which is sometimes gloomily indulged, of a forlorn region, where nothing is to be beheld but dreary and inhospitable wastes, and no objects are to be met with but serpents that hiss, and wild beasts that devour. The prospect is rather that of a mixed region, where indeed rugged rocks are seen, and deserts extend, over which the tempest sometimes scowls; but where also many peaceful habitations and fruitful fields occur to refresh the sight.

THE DOCTRINE OF A FUTURE STATE.

JORTIN.

Our Lord found the doctrine of a future state, established amongst the Jews, and not quite obliterated amongst the Gentiles; yet he might truly be said to bring immortality to light, or to throw a new light upon the doctrine of immortality, as this doctrine was better proved and confirmed by him, than it was before, and as the gospel speaks of an *eternal* and *unchangeable* happiness, which may be attained by serving God, and which neither human reason can discover, nor any former revelation had expressly declared. Our Saviour was the first Christian teacher, who in a full and clear manner

delivered to men, and particularly to the Gentiles, the important truths of the remission of sins, a resurrection, a future judgment, and an impartial distribution of rewards and punishments in that everlasting state which should take place at the end of the world.

Good men in the Old Testament, and Christians in the New, are represented as strangers and sojourners in a foreign country. Christians are said to be not of this world, to have no continuing city here, but to seek one to come; to have their conversation in heaven, to be members of the heavenly society; and they are exhorted to pass the time of their sojourning in pious fear. The religion which we profess, bids us look upon ourselves as strangers here below. We are, or we should be, the servants of Christ. His kingdom is not of this world: he has promised us no honors, or certain possessions here; he reigns with his Father; and has told us, that where he is, there we shall be also.—Whilst we are here, we are absent from our Master, from our home, from those abodes where only we have a promise to find rest and happiness.

The inference is obvious, that since we are strangers and sojourners for a few days, in a world for the most part unkind and deceitful to its worthiest inhabitants, where sin, folly, and trouble abound, and since we have the prospect of a better country, to which, if it be not our own fault, we shall have

access, we ought to entertain inclinations and views suitable to our condition, and so use the present as to secure the future; that is, in few words, we ought to live virtuously and religiously, not too much dejected under disappointments and afflictions, nor proud or over-elated at temporal advantages; ready to resign with decency and good temper what else we must resign unwillingly, and not dependent upon those things on which our eternal happiness does not depend.

Strangers and pilgrims we are in this world, not only as we are Christians, but as we are men. We want not the light of revelation to lead us to the discovery of this truth; we must be acquainted with it, we cannot shut out its irresistible evidence. Forget it we may for a season, and put off the thoughts of it; but they will force themselves upon the mind at certain times, and many occasions will oblige us to remember, that we must go hence, and part with all that we love so immoderately. We may set our hearts upon earthly things, and make them so necessary to us, as not to be able to enjoy any quiet without them. We may employ all our days and our industry in labouring to acquire and secure them. We may inflame our passions, weaken our reason, and endear this world to us, and thus render ourselves unwilling to leave it, and unfit to die. Thus far our power reaches; but it cannot alter the stubborn nature of things, it cannot fix those which

are fleeting and delusive, nor stamp innocence upon those which are forbidden.

Nature and experience teach us, that we are strangers here; and that though the things of this life are very unequally distributed amongst men, and the most deserving are sometimes the worst accommodated, yet, death, equals and levels all, and makes the difference between their condition appear almost insensible. This consideration alone might keep us from envying the rich and powerful, and from a slavish regard to earthly things; but it might still leave us dissatisfied with our state, and inclined to think that we might as well have never been called into being. Religion joins her testimony to our experience, in telling us, that we are strangers and sojourners here below; but then—she tells better things, and assures us, that we have a home, and peaceful abodes where we shall dwell for ever.

Since then by the divine appointment, and the laws of nature, our continuance here is short, and our present possessions uncertain, the best course that we can take to pass those few days with comfort and satisfaction is, to remember the end for which we were made, to provide for the unchangeable state to which we are approaching, and to entertain moderate affections towards the things which we cannot call our own. He who acts thus, if we sup-

pose him to have fewer pleasures than worldly minded persons, which however is not true, yet he has undoubtedly fewer troubles and disappointments, and is better able to bear them whenever they befall him.

ON HAPPINESS.

JORTIN.

When we reflect upon the wants, calamities, follies, passions, and weaknesses of human nature, a state of happiness seems not consistent with it. It looks like an amusing speculation, a pretty phantom, a creature of imagination, which is no where realized and exemplified. All are agreed in desiring and in seeking it; but how do they seek it? It is often in so foolish a manner, as if they had projected before hand to be disappointed.

If men have lost the reins of self-government, it is impossible that they should find happiness, or any thing that approaches to it. Whilst unruly affections, extravagant desires, vain hopes and fears, discompose the mind; to suppose happiness in such a state, is to suppose contradictions, to imagine light and darkness, health and sickness, storms and serenity united together. There may be an inward tranquillity, whilst all is gloomy and stormy without; but there can be no degree of it, when the

mind itself is uneasy and disturbed at every frivolous accident.

It is not enough towards producing happiness, that men are at certain times composed and quiet; for happiness should be a settled state, not liable to great and sudden changes; and complete happiness is, an uniform and uninterrupted enjoyment of the greatest good of which our nature is capable. Less than this can suffice indeed, and ought to suffice to make us contented; but less than this is not to be called true felicity. Consequently, no such condition is to be expected in our present changeable and imperfect state, even though we endeavour to perform our duty suitably to our station and abilities. Happiness in an high degree, is not an inhabitant of this earth, nor made for man during the days of his mortality.

Imagination conduces in some degree towards the comfort or uneasiness of life. There is this evidence of its influence, that the same person, under the same circumstances, shall think himself happy or unhappy by the different turn of his fancy.—If he fixes his thoughts wholly on the dark side, and the melancholy prospect of worldly affairs in general, or of his own affairs in particular, and represents himself as in danger of undergoing all the probable, or the possible evils of life; let these sad thoughts be uppermost in his mind, he cannot be happy, or even easy, though his condition upon the

whole may be very tolerable.—It is certain, that he who thinks himself miserable, goes a great way towards making himself so. He therefore who would promote his own repose and satisfaction, must endeavour to draw his mind off from the fear of evils which may never happen, or which may be compensated by some advantages. He must submit to the dispensations of providence in the things which befall him, and entertain himself with the lawful comforts of life, which are within his reach and depend upon the goodness of God for the time to come. This is the true art of living, and herein lies that portion of happiness which may be found in our present state.

If happiness requires contentment and satisfaction, we are to seek it in that which is most apt to produce the most lasting bliss. And we soon find that mere sensual pleasures end in uneasiness, that they are short, uncertain, and unsatisfactory. On the contrary, we find that the pleasures of a well-disposed mind, and of a good conscience, are of an abiding nature, and always grateful to the inward taste, and have no such stings and bitter remorses as the violent pursuit of unlawful objects leaves behind it.

The true happiness of man is of a spiritual kind, as being suitable to his nature and to his best qualities. The mind or the soul, is the seat and source

of the contentment, satisfaction, and felicity proper to it, and consequently the highest degree of happiness, must be of the rational and intellectual kind.

The Christian doctrine is not morose; it does not discard pleasure, as evil in itself; but it represents it, as dangerous to gratify the senses with every pleasing object, and to shun every act that is attended with labour, abstinence, and self-denial. As to the pleasures, which are consistent with the health of the soul and of the body, with the duties of a rational creature,—religion forbids them not, but advises us to receive them, as the gifts of God with thanksgiving.

Solomon says of wisdom and religion, that her ways are ways of pleasantness. Doubtless they are; for if religion is self-government, and the performance of the most commendable actions; it produces a calm and unsullied pleasure, surpassing those of the senses and of the imagination. To worship God, to forsake sin, and to do righteousness, will appear upon due consideration the most desirable conduct.

ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF TIME.

BLAIR.

TIME is of so great importance to mankind, that it cannot too often employ religious meditation. There is nothing in the management of which, wisdom is more requisite, or where mankind display their inconsistency more. In its particular parcels, they appear entirely careless of it, and throw it away in thoughtless profusion. But when collected into some of its greatest portions, and viewed as the measure of their continuance in life, they become sensible of its value, and begin to regard it with a serious eye. While day after day, is wasted in a course of idleness or vicious pleasures, if some incident shall occur which leads the most inconsiderate man to think of his age, or time of life; how much of it is gone; at what period of it, he is now arrived; and to what proportion of it, he can with any probability look forward, as yet to come; he can hardly avoid feeling some secret compunction, and reflecting seriously upon his state. Happy if that virtuous impression were not of momentary continuance, but retained its influence amidst the succeeding cares and pleasures of the world!

It is a remarkable peculiarity in the restrospect of former life; that it is commonly attended with

some measure of heaviness of heart. Even to the most prosperous, the memory of joys that are past, is accompanied with secret sorrow. In the days of former years, many objects rise to view, which make the unthinking, grave; and render the serious sad. The pleasurable scenes of youth, the objects on which our affections had been early placed, the companions and friends with whom we had spent many happy days, even the places and the occupations to which we have been long accustomed, but to which we have now bidden farewell, can hardly ever be recalled, without softening, nor sometimes without piercing the heart. Though it may be very proper that such meditations should sometimes enter the mind, yet, on them I advise not the gentle and tender heart to dwell too long. They are apt to produce a fruitless melancholy; to deject, without bringing much improvement; to thicken the gloom which already hangs over human life, without furnishing proportionable assistance to virtue.

Our spiritual interests will be best promoted by a regular performance of all the duties of ordinary life. Let these therefore occupy a great share of the present hour. Whatever our age, our character, our profession, or station in the world, requires us to do, in that let each revolving day find us busy. Never delay till to-morrow, what reason and conscience tell you ought to be performed to-day. To-morrow is not your's, and though you should

live to enjoy it, you must not overload it with a burden not its own.—The observance of order and method, is of high consequence for the improvement of time. He who performs every employment in its due place and season, suffers no part of time to escape without profit. He multiplies his days; for he lives much in little space. Whereas he who neglects order in the arrangement of his occupations, is always losing the present in returning upon the past, and trying in vain, to recover it when gone. Let me advise you frequently to make the present employment of time an object of thought. Ask yourselves, about what you are now busied? What is the ultimate scope of your present pursuits and cares? Can you justify them to yourselves? Are they likely to produce any thing that will survive the moment, and bring forth some fruit for futurity? He, who can give no satisfactory answers to such questions as these, has reason to suspect that his employment of the present, is not tending either to his advantage or his honor.

Let us consider with what dispositions we ought to look forward to those years of our life that may yet be to come. Futurity is the great object on which the imaginations of men are employed; for the sake of which, the past is forgotten, and the present too often neglected. All time is in a measure swallowed up by it. On futurity men build their designs; on futurity they rest their hopes; and though not happy at the present, they always

reckon on becoming so at some subsequent period of their lives. This propensity to look forward was, for wise purposes, implanted in the human breast. It serves to give proper occupation to the active powers of the mind, and to quicken all its exertions. But it is too often immoderately indulged and grossly abused.—Let us restrain all desire of penetrating farther than is allowed us, into that dark and unknown region. Futurity belongs to God; and happy for us, is that mysterious veil, with which his wisdom has covered it. Were it in our power to lift up the veil, and to behold what it conceals, many, and many a thorn we should plant in our breasts!

All anxiety about futurity, which passes the bounds of reasonable precaution, is unprofitable and vain. Certain measures are indeed necessary to be taken for our safety. We are not to rush forward inconsiderately and headstrong. We must make, as far as we are able, provision for future welfare; and guard against dangers which apparently threaten. But having done this, we must stop; and leave the rest to him, who disposeth of futurity at his will. *He who sitteth in the heavens laughs*, at the wisdom, and the plans of worldly men. Wherefore *boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* For the same reason, despair not of to-morrow; for it may bring forth good as well as evil. Vex not yourselves with imaginary fears.—Carry alway along with you a modest and a

temperate mind. Let not your expectations from the years that are to come rise too high; and your disappointments will be fewer, and more easily supported. This may be reckoned on as certain, that in every future situation of life, a good conscience, a well ordered mind, and a humble trust in the favor of Heaven, will prove the essential ingredients of your happiness.—As you advance in life study to improve both in good principles and in good practice. You will be enabled to look to futurity without fear, if, whatever it brings, it shall find you regularly employed in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Lord your God.

THE END.

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